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OR,

Level-Headed Luke's Legacy.

BY JO PIERCE,

(of the N. Y. Detective Force.)

AUTHOR OF "HOTSPUR BOB," "VAGABOND
DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A CHANCE FOR A LEVEL-HEADED BOY.

LUKE HARTLEY was sleeping in the presence of death.

He was a boy of fourteen years, and at that time of life sleep is sound; so the heavy, unnatural breathing of the dying person on the bed passed unheard by him.

The room was a miserable, poorly-furnished place, and the hand of poverty was over all. As though this was not enough, Death had come to join his grim co-worker, Want, and a human life was ebbing away on the

SHADOW

THE UNKNOWN CAME NEARER AND THEN PAUSED BY THE SUICIDE'S GRAVE—UNKNOWN, BECAUSE THE BOY SHADOW PLAINLY SAW THAT IT WAS NEITHER THE LAWYER NOR TRIPP.

dark current as only the lives of the poor go.

Perhaps it was just as well that Luke slept, for he could have done no good, and sorrow would come to him soon enough—for the pale-faced woman whose end was so near was his mother.

Something—it may have been her heavy breathing—disturbed the boy's rest as he slept in his chair, and his eyes were opened with a start.

He looked at the sufferer, and then his own face grew pale. Boy that he was, he realized what that change in her looks and breathing meant.

"Mother!" he cried, in terror.

The dying woman stirred slightly. She had been unconscious of all around her, but that voice penetrated to the depths of her loving heart.

"Mother, awake! Tell me what is wrong?"

Her eyes unclosed and she looked at him, but the luster was forever gone from them; her grasp on the known world was feeble, indeed.

"Luke," she whispered, in a barely-audible voice, "I am dying!"

"Oh!" cried the boy, trembling violently, "let me go for help. Let me—"

"No, it would do no good. The doctor has warned us of this, and it is well. My only regret is that I leave you friendless. Oh! my moments grow short, and there is one thing I must say before I die. Luke, your father—"

She paused, and her gaze wavered.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Luke. "What of my father?"

"Your father was—was the son of—"

Again she wandered, and the almost heart-broken boy caressed her cold hand in speechless agony.

"I must tell you of him, for it may make your whole future happy. Your father—ah! he is here now!"

For one moment strength seemed given the dying woman, her face grew radiant and her arms were outstretched, and then she fell back—as lifeless as the pillow she touched. Her lips, silent now forever, would never tell the boy of his father, and Luke Hartley was alone in the world.

He flung himself on her bosom and tears gushed freely from his eyes. Not then did he think of the unspoken revelation; he only realized that he had been deprived of the only relative he knew, and his heart seemed breaking.

The scene was in an old house on Water street, in the city of New Haven; a quaint, old-fashioned, none-too-attractive street, with every variety of buildings along its way, and the salt water of Long Island Sound but a step distant, formed in what is familiarly called "The Basin."

Poor and dilapidated as was the house to which we have called attention, the Hartleys had occupied but one room. It was all they could pay for, for poverty was with them an every-day companion, and since the mother had been ill they had been able to pay nothing.

And now she was dead, and Luke was alone, penniless, friendless and almost broken-hearted.

What followed was like a bitter dream, but Luke was vaguely surprised when the landlord, Ebenezer Hare, who before seemed hard-hearted and attentive only to dollars and cents, took charge of everything and saw the dead woman respectfully consigned to her last resting-place.

Not until after the funeral did Luke pause to think seriously of himself, but, once more in the now dreadfully silent room, he turned his attention to practical matters.

He was alone, and must somehow earn a living and pay Hare the debt which looked so large. How could he do it? For some time previous to his mother's death, he had sold papers on Chapel, State and other streets, but if his past experience was any criterion, he could never pay the debt at that business.

No; something else must be done.

He often wondered what his mother had wished to say just before she died. His father he could not remember, and Mrs. Hartley had always seemed to wish to avoid speaking of him until that dark night, when, all too late, she had turned to the subject.

What had she tried to say? Luke could not imagine. She had always said that his father died when he was two years old, but, it now occurred to him, he did not even know where he was buried.

The boy's earliest recollections were of Worcester, Massachusetts, and then they had lived in Boston, coming to New Haven two years before the time of his mother's death.

Luke was thinking of all this when Mr. Ebene-

zer Hare entered the room. The landlord was a man of about sixty years, tall, slender and emaciated, with a decided stoop to his shoulders and a habit of dressing in the most solemn black clothes imaginable.

His voice was low and bland, though of a soprano inflection—it could grow very shrill when he was angry—and when in good-humor he had a habit of speaking as though taking the listener into sacred confidence, even though the subject was trivial.

He now advanced with a smile which, like all his smiles, consisted of a laugh around his eyes and nose, and a drawing down of the corners of his mouth.

"Good-evening, Luke, I thought I would come in and see you, for it occurred to me you might be lonesome, don't you see?"

"I am lonesome, Mr. Hare," replied Luke, his lips quivering.

"That is because you have lost a good mother, and, between you and me, a mother is a good friend. I know what it is to lose one."

Mr. Hare rubbed the end of his nose, but did not think necessary to add that he had driven his aged mother out of doors, and allowed her to die in a poor-house.

"Well, my boy, what are you going to do now?" he added, more briskly.

"That is just what I am trying to decide, sir, for I am anxious to pay you."

"Shall you continue to sell papers?"

"I can't make enough at that."

"You ought to have a place where you can work during the day, and then sell papers afterward."

"That would be a capital thing, Mr. Hare."

"Are you willing to do it?"

"I should jump at the chance. Do you know of any such opportunity, sir?"

Mr. Hare smiled his broadest smile.

"I do, Luke, and, between you and me, that is why I have come here. Now, I have a friend who is a lawyer—Mr. Phineas Lorimer, is his name—and he said to me only yesterday that he wanted a level-headed office-boy. The boy's duties would be to take care of the office and run errands—and, perhaps, a few other things—all of which would be very light, pleasant work, with a chance to sit still a good deal, don't you see? And the office closes at four o'clock."

Luke's eager face showed to what a degree he had grown interested.

"What will he pay such a boy, sir?"

"Well, Luke," was the confidential reply, "he said, at first, three dollars a week. 'Can't you pay more?' I asked. 'That is a large sum for an office-boy,' he replied. 'Ah, yes,' I said, 'but the boy of whom I know is not only very level-headed, but he writes a beautiful hand, and could help you about your papers.'"

"I think that is so," modestly observed Luke.

"Certainly it is, my lad, and I presented the fact strongly to Mr. Lorimer. He was much impressed, and said that if he found my *protégé* level-headed to an *unusual* extent, he would pay four dollars."

"And will he really take me?" asked Luke, his eyes sparkling.

"Between you and me, if he likes you, he will."

"Mr. Hare," cried the boy, "I can never sufficiently thank you. If I can get this place, and sell papers after office-hours, I can not only meet my expenses, but pay you something every week."

"Admirable, my boy! I am pleased to hear you speak thus. Between you and me, youthful ambition is a charming trait. Well, if Mr. Lorimer gives you the place you can remain right here, and my advice shall always be yours, don't you see?"

Once more Luke thanked the landlord warmly. It seemed strange to regard him as a benefactor, for he had often spoken harshly to the boy's mother when he failed to get his money, but Luke explained this by supposing that his friendless condition had touched Mr. Hare's heart.

"One thing more I must mention," said the landlord, at parting. "Mr. Lorimer is a deacon, and a shining light of the St. Adam Church Society. He is really one of the greatest, best and most honorable men in all this city, and one whose whole soul revolts at the mere idea of wrong-doing. Of course such a man is very sensitive, and a hint that he would do a wrong thing would grieve him deeply. Now, you know how natural it is for a conscientious person out of work to say, 'I am ready to do anything that is honest.' But it would never do to say that to Mr. Lorimer. It would cause him deep sorrow if any one answered him thus, because he really

could not allow wrong to be done near him. So you must be careful and not wound his feelings by using such a term, don't you see?"

Luke said that he understood.

He thought he did, and that it would be very pleasant to work for such a conscientious employer.

"And when he asks if you are willing to obey him in all things, you will answer yes, promptly?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is right, for we should be careful and hurt no one's feelings."

Mr. Hare smiled in his peculiar way again, and then bade Luke good-night and left the room.

The boy was elated, and grateful to the landlord. Nothing, he thought, could be more timely, and he resolved to do his best to please the conscientious lawyer. To work for such a man must certainly be pleasant, and by using all possible industry he could gradually pay what was due Mr. Hare. In fact, so elated was he, he dreamed that night that he had been elected president of Yale College at a large salary.

In the morning Hare took him to see the conscientious lawyer. Exceptional integrity had not left its imprint perceptibly on Mr. Lorimer's features, though possibly it was responsible for his corpulent figure and high-colored face. He had a ponderous nose, thick lips and bulging eyes, and small red side-whiskers met an abundant crop of hair of the same kind.

This hair stood up aggressively over his head, and, Luke thought, seemed capable of frightening witnesses in court, or vice in any place.

Mr. Lorimer looked the boy applicant over carefully, asked him some questions, had him to show his ability with pen and ink, and then made him take a seat in strong light and spoke further.

"Now, boy, you must understand that this office is literally and emphatically a place of business. There is no folly or sentiment here. Do you follow me?"

"I think so, sir."

"What people *think* amounts to nothing in law. What I want is facts—cast-iron facts, boy. Do you, or do you not, *know* whether you understand me?"

Luke was not naturally timid, but all this seemed so much like being in the witness-box, though Mr. Lorimer was not severe, that he became somewhat confused, and vaguely replied:

"Yes, sir."

The answer was indefinite, but the lawyer let it pass and continued:

"That is better. Now I, boy, claim to be a level-headed man, and I want only similar people near me. Are you level-headed?"

"Yes, sir," replied Luke, without much idea of what he was saying or talking about.

"Very good. Now, are you prepared to obey me in all things?"

Mr. Hare coughed slightly to remind Luke that he was talking with a conscientious man, and the boy obediently replied:

"I am, sir."

"Very good—very good, indeed. Also, I suppose you would make my interests your chief study?"

"Certainly, Mr. Lorimer."

"And use *finesse* in dealing with my clients?"

"Use *what*, sir?" asked Luke, in perplexity.

"Well, to express it more plainly, great care and shrewdness to make others see that my way is always the correct way."

"I should do my best, Mr. Lorimer," Luke answered, without a full comprehension of what the promise implied.

"Then, speaking from a legal point, you are engaged."

CHAPTER II.

WHAT LUKE OVERHEARD.

LUKE's labors began without delay, and, so early did he get away from the office, he made something every evening by selling papers. His position with Mr. Lorimer did not prove so easy as Ebenezer Hare had represented, but the boy was willing to work, and he had an earnest, deft way of performing his duties which could not but please any employer, conscientious or otherwise.

The boy's faith in the conscientiousness of his employer was daily receiving rude shocks, and he wondered if Mr. Hare could satisfactorily account for the fact that Lorimer often indulged in profanity, and dealt with some of his clients in a way which they, when their eyes were opened, spoke of as "infamous."

In brief, Mr. Lorimer was not an eminent member of the bar, and, in order to make a good living—which he did by "hook or crook"—he

resorted to every trick and trap which his prolific brain could invent.

This was what he called *finesse*.

Of course, Luke did not discover all this in a day; his eyes were opened gradually, and it was not until after events to be related, that he arrived at a full comprehension.

Lorimer's legal quarters consisted of two rooms, in the second of which his clerk sat and wielded a pen which invariably "scratched" dolefully. This room was called the "Inner Temple," and Mr. Marmaduke Tripp, the clerk, was the presiding genius.

He was a man between thirty and fifty—it would be hard to locate him more definitely. He was extremely thin, beardless and pale, and his hair was a tow-colored forest, making him look top-heavy. He was, however, bland, nimble and light-footed, and made an excellent ally for his employer.

Luke had been two weeks in his new situation when he overheard a conversation which led to unexpected results.

When Lorimer arrived one morning both Tripp and Luke were writing, the clerk in the Inner Temple, and the boy near the connecting door.

The lawyer went through his mail, and then Marmaduke came to the door and coughed slightly.

Lorimer turned.

"What is it, Tripp?"

"Are you busy, sir?"

"Not particularly."

"Then I would like to see you, if you please."

Lorimer promptly entered the Inner Temple and sat down.

"Go on!" he directed.

"You will remember our agreement, sir, that when I bring you any business I am to receive—"

"Never mind the preface," said the lawyer, with a wave of his hand. "I've heard it scores of times. Come to business! What fish have you hooked now?"

"Will you kindly peruse this letter, sir?"

"Read it aloud," Lorimer directed, impatiently.

Marmaduke bowed and proceeded to obey; and thus it was that Luke, sitting near the door, heard every word. His work was not such as to demand close application, and the reader's words came to his ears without an effort to listen.

Mr. Tripp read:

"No. — FLEET STREET,
LONDON, ENGLAND, MAY 6, 18—."

"DEAR SIR:—Your prompt answer to our advertisement was unexpected by us, but we are pleased to hear that you believe you can help us. The facts of the case are as follows: Lionel Hugh Beringbrooke, gentleman, of this city, has departed this life and left property to the amount of one hundred thousand pounds. So far as is known, he has no heir whatever in England, and the only prospect of finding one anywhere is to trace Rupert Beringbrooke, cousin of Lionel, who left London for the United States in 1832. Rupert, if alive, is now sixty-eight years of age, having been born in 1812. Nothing has been heard from him since, but if he is alive, or has left descendants, he, or they, are heirs to the £100,000. The money will be paid on proof of identification, less our fee, reward to finder of said heir, or heirs, and other costs. If you can help us, let us hear from you at once."

"To M. TRIPP, Esq. WARBLACK BROTHERS, Solicitors."

The clerk laid down the letter and looked up. "Humph!" said Lorimer; "there is money in that; but do you know Rupert Beringbrooke?"

"No, sir."

"Then we may as well hunt for a needle in a haystack."

"Ah! but, sir, I know of Beringbrooke."

"Ha! that is better. What about him?"

"He is dead—died in 1845."

"Heirs?"

"He left two children, both of whom were then very young; Alfred, aged three; Eunice, aged one."

"What about these children?"

"Alfred is dead. Blew his brains out in 1867."

"Humph! mighty bad taste. But you seem to have the matter down fine. Did he leave heirs?"

"He left a family; but, sir, I think we had better not consider them."

"Why not?"

"First, because I do not know where they now are; secondly, because I think we can do better."

"Just so! Let me hear what scheme is in your prolific brain."

Mr. Tripp bowed, smiled and blushed.

"You honor me, Mr. Lorimer. Well, in a word, I can put my hand on Eunice's heirs at

any moment. She, too, is dead; but, having previously married, she left a son. We can make whatever terms we see fit with this boy and his father—I know them well—and we can't say as much in regard to Alfred's heirs."

"But what if Eunice's heir should insist on justice being done the other branch?"

Mr. Tripp smiled broadly.

"Eunice's heir, sir, has been so well tutored by his worthy father that he would not divide an apple with another person unless he was obliged to do so."

"In that case, we may not be able to drive our bargain."

"No fear of that. Our prospective clients are wholly in the dark; they don't even know of Lionel Beringbrooke; and we can make them pay well. I know them like a book, and assure you nobody could be more pliant to deal with—or more pliant of conscience."

"Very good, Tripp, very good," said the lawyer, approvingly. "We will leave Alfred and his tribe wholly out of question, and take the other branch. But is there nothing in the evidence which proves Eunice's claim, that might also show up Alfred too conspicuously? Of course, in business, we can't let folly track us, and we will dispose of Alfred with a snap of our fingers, if he will be disposed of. But may not the legal heirs pop up?"

Luke Hartley had heard all this with growing dismay. With his ideas of justice it would be a great wrong to ignore the real heirs and put others forward, and he was shocked to find that Mr. Lorimer would do such a thing.

He felt that he should be haunted by mental pictures of the wronged heirs, who were, possibly, as poor as he, and he would gladly have heard no more; but his orders were to remain at the desk and write, and this undisguised conversation would steal into his ears, whether or no.

He wondered that Lorimer should talk so plainly before a mere office-boy, but an explanation of the matter was afterward reached.

To the lawyer's last objection Tripp replied:

"There is danger of that—just a trifle—but the danger can be partially removed by a bold step on our part."

"How so, if you don't know where Alfred's heirs are?" Lorimer inquired.

"It is not from them that I fear trouble. The widow of Alfred will certainly never make herself known; she dares not, even though she might see this advertisement of Warblack Brothers, which she probably will not do. What we have to fear most is documentary evidence, and this can be got rid of."

"What is the evidence?"

Marmaduke glanced toward the other room, where Luke sat writing, and lowered his voice.

"This is not the place to explain that, sir, but, if you will meet me this evening, you shall learn."

"Come to my house."

"No, Mr. Lorimer. You know where Gray Stone Church is, don't you?"

"The antique pile, just out of town?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have seen it."

"Very well; meet me there at eight o'clock this evening and all shall be settled."

"Are you mad, Tripp? Why should I go there, so far out of town?" the lawyer asked, in amazement.

Tripp leaned nearer and said something in a voice too low to reach Luke's ears. Lorimer replied, and several low-spoken remarks passed between them. Then a brief silence was broken by the lawyer:

"This is a serious matter. If we are discovered, the law can take hold of us with a vengeance."

"Nothing venture, nothing have," the clerk replied, coolly. "Remember that we are to dictate our terms to those we set up as heirs, and if we don't get a fat sum it is our own fault."

"You are sure of them?"

"I am, sir."

"What is their name?"

"Littleton. Eunice married Peter Littleton in 1864. The only child she left was born one year later and, consequently, is now fifteen years old. He sells papers on the street, for the family—Littleton is married again—are poor as church mice. This boy, whom we select for our heir, is named Percy Littleton."

Luke Hartley started.

The name was not a new one to him, nor was the bearer thereof a stranger. He had known him for several months, but never to his pleasure. Weak of both body and mind, young Littleton was a peevish, disagreeable young fellow

with an over-exalted opinion of himself; an arrogant, conceited and vain youth, with nothing of which he could justly be vain. Aspiring to be ruler of the section where he saw fit to sell his papers, he and Luke had clashed more than once; and the latter was cordially hated because his superior agility enabled him to outdo Littleton.

Luke now became deeply interested in the case. He knew Percy well enough to be sure he would agree to any dishonorable scheme proposed by Marmaduke Tripp, and would never give a thought to the rightful heirs who were being robbed of their due.

"Well," continued Lorimer, "I want to see this boy and his father. It is important that they should be correctly estimated before our hand is shown. I trust you have said nothing to them?"

"Not a word, sir, though I know them personally."

"Ah! you do, eh? Now, see here, I hope you are not trying to outdo me in *finesse*. Are you sure there is no plot within this plot?"

Mr. Tripp met his employer's suspicious gaze firmly, and assured him that all was "square and above-board."

"Very well, I'll take the case if it pans out as you say, and I'll meet you at the Gray Stone Church to-night. At eight, you said?"

"Yes, sir; eight o'clock, and at the gate which leads to the graveyard connected with the church."

"I'll be there. By the way, Tripp," here the lawyer glanced toward the other room, and at Luke, busily writing, "we won't mention this before the boy."

"Can't he be trusted, sir?"

"Oh! yes, in ordinary affairs. Ebenezer Hare vouches for him; he's an unscrupulous young knave, and Hare once saved him from jail. He's all right, or I should not have him here, but this matter is too risky to take a boy into, however level-headed he may be."

"I'm afraid he's overheard something already," the clerk uneasily answered.

"Nonsense! He can't get a distinct word at that distance. Besides, he's all bound up in his work. Well, I'll meet you this evening, Tripp, and now to business."

The conversation ceased, but Luke's pen moved on. It moved mechanically, however. His mind was on other matters. His hearing had proved more acute than Mr. Lorimer imagined, and he was an uninvited confidant in an iniquitous scheme.

His last spark of confidence in Lorimer was gone, and the same remark would apply to Hare. In securing him a position, Hare had deceived both parties. He had told the lawyer that Luke was a criminal, and said that Lorimer was a deeply religious man.

Both statements had clearly been made up bodily, though the boy could hardly see the landlord's object, unless it was to place him where his debt could be quickly discharged.

He was destined to learn what the wily schemer's object was at no distant day, but, mingled with indignation at the libel on his character, his chief subject of thought was Marmaduke Tripp's plot.

CHAPTER III.

THE GRAY STONE CHURCH.

LUKE remained at his post of duty all through the day, and nothing in his manner indicated that he had heard anything of the late conversation. Marmaduke Tripp looked at him critically several times, as though to judge by his looks whether he was unscrupulous enough for their office or not.

Had the boy not possessed unusual self-control and firmness, he would not have been able to keep his secret. He knew the office of Phineas Lorimer was not the proper place for one who had any regard for honor, and his position troubled him.

He began to understand what Lorimer meant when he said he wanted a "level-headed boy." It was only another way of saying that he wanted one devoid of conscience.

Luke maintained his coolness all day and acted naturally, so that even Tripp's suspicious eyes saw nothing out of the way; but before the hour of closing he had come to a decision.

The two men contemplated something for that night which was of such a grave nature that even Lorimer had hesitated to engage in it, and Luke felt that it would be criminal for him not to take some step in it.

His first idea had been to go to the police, but he could readily see that his word would weigh lightly against that of the lawyer.

The idea was abandoned, and, instead, he resolved to be at the place of meeting and watch to see what they would do. There was danger in the plan, but he was naturally of a bold nature, and a sense of duty led him on.

That night he sold no papers. He had heard of the Gray Stone Church, but had never been there, and wanted a chance to see it by daylight and learn the locality somewhat before the conspirators arrived.

Accordingly, he lost but little time after the office closed before he took the proper conveyance and started on his journey. Before he reached its end the real streets of New Haven ceased, and the way became more of the country than the city order.

At last he stood beside the Gray Stone Church.

It was a building far older than he; how old he did not know; but he could well believe it connected with the infancy of New Haven.

Age had left its marks on every stone, though they were in a good state of preservation except for discoloration, and the style of architecture was of another generation.

In the rear of the church was a graveyard where marble slabs gleamed thickly, and in rows, like marshaled soldiers. Even there age was perceptible, and perhaps the oldest of the stones sheltered the builders of the church.

There was, however, an air of peace and rest all around, and the many trees made the place beautiful.

It was yet a considerable time before the hour when Lorimer and Tripp were to meet, and Luke decided to take a stroll in the graveyard while day yet remained. That there was much that was curious in the place, he could not doubt.

He passed through and began wandering along, but it was not until he had reached the further side of the inclosure that he became aware of the presence of others.

When he saw them he paused.

An old man whose hair was white, and a girl of about seven years, stood together. He was trimming a flowering shrub, and she stood by, a bunch of flowers in one hand, watching him work.

Both were talking, and with that unity of thought which exists between children and those of advanced years, and the picture was so peaceful that Luke was led to approach.

The quick eyes of the child soon discovered him, and at a word from her the old man looked up. Luke spoke politely:

"Good-evening, sir."

"Good-evening, my boy," was the kind reply, though the old man looked at the new-comer sharply. "I do not seem to recognize you."

"Very likely, sir, for I am from the city."

"Ah! Perhaps you've grown tired of it, and come to see our half-country place?"

"I always like the country."

"So do I, though I see it fading from me here day by day. Time was when this was Nature's own abiding-place, but more houses are erected every year—the city is encroaching on us. Well, I can bear it, for, in a few years, I shall be laid to rest here, in the place for which I've cared for full fifty years."

"Grandpa is sexton of the church, and has care of the graveyard," explained the child.

"He has done his work well," declared Luke, looking at the orderly, beautiful walks and trees.

"Thank you, young sir; thank you," the old man replied, with almost childish pleasure. "Yes, even though all this is my work, I fancy there are few cities of the dead that look better. There is only one thing that I regret."

"What is that, sir?"

"Come this way!"

Luke followed, and was led to a grave a few yards distant. It did not seem different from the others, for the grass was smooth and green; but, when the face of the marble slab was seen, Luke understood the mournful expression on the old man's face.

Evidently there had been an inscription there, but now only three rough, indented lines across the surface marked where it had been.

Luke needed but one glance to realize that some sacrilegious hand had rudely cut away the record, whatever it had been.

"See," said the sexton, with real pathos in his voice, "some vandal has been here, and you see his mark. The inscription has been cut away."

"What could have been the object—mischievous?" Luke asked.

The old man shook his head.

"I think it was something more."

"Revenge?"

"Indeed, I am at a loss to say. Had it occur-

red a half-score years ago, I might have explained it more easily, but now—surely the dead should be forgiven."

"What was the name, sir?"

"The inscription read: 'William Hallock, aged 25. The Master will know even me.'"

"Were you acquainted with him?"

"I knew him in death, as man should know man, but not in life. Thirteen years I have cared for this grave alone, for no friend of his came to help me; but it was a labor of love for one so friendless. And now—now—the stone is defaced, and it occurred only last night."

"Last night? Then it must have been done merely as mischief. If he had enemies they would have come before now."

Again the sexton shook his head.

"You don't know all. This is the grave of a suicide!"

Luke started.

"Of a suicide?"

"Yes. The poor young man shot himself beside the south wall of the church, and here he was buried, friendless and, perhaps, unknown. The name which was on the stone was supposed to be his because of a letter found in his pocket after death, but it is not certain. There was a loud outcry against allowing an unknown suicide to be buried here, and it would not have been done only for our kind old pastor. He prevailed, but I know that the grave has been an eyesore to the uncharitable, and I cannot but fear, even at this late day, that some of them have allowed their prejudices to still the voice of conscience—that they have done this!"

"It would be a cowardly thing to do, sir; it was cowardly, whoever did it."

"The doer of the deed came and acted like a coward. He chose night for his time, and every word of the inscription is gone."

Pathetic indeed was the old man's voice.

Luke felt awe and sadness, and he asked, in a hushed voice:

"Why did the young man kill himself?"

"I cannot say. He left no message, and I can only conclude that he found his burden too heavy to bear. Poor fellow! the world sneers at and condemns the suicide, but what man knows the sorrow that his brother may have? Rash this man was, but his trouble and his death were alike between himself and his God. It is not for man to judge him."

Luke felt strangely impressed and saddened, but, considering the place and the aged sexton, this was not so very remarkable.

He desired to ask more about the dead man, but the child called her grandfather's attention to the growing twilight, and he gathered up his tools.

"The memory of this defaced stone will haunt me," he said, at parting, "but I hope I may live to see it restored to proper condition. Some one should be charitable enough to do it."

Adding a kind good-night, he went away, the child clinging to his hand. Luke was left alone by the grave. He remained for some time, wondering who had been so unfeeling as to mutilate it, but a deep sadness had fallen upon him; recollections of his mother came vividly; and he walked away to banish gloomy thought.

It was nearing the hour when Lorimer and Tripp were to meet, and the young Shadow—for that he had now become—went to the gate and concealed himself in the shrubbery.

Half an hour passed, and then a familiar form appeared in the darkness which had fallen. It was Marmaduke Tripp.

He paused near the gate and began to softly whistle a lively air, but scarcely five minutes had elapsed when the lawyer appeared on the scene.

"You're on good time, I see," Tripp observed.

"Yes. Have you waited long? This is an uncanny place for a meeting. Why didn't you select the interior of some tomb?"

"I brought you here because there was work for us to do, as I outlined in the office."

"Well, I want more light now. Your scheme is a daring one, and too risky to suit me, but if you can convince me that it is really necessary, you won't find me backward."

"I can convince you. Come this way, and let us walk in the shadow of the church."

They moved away, and Luke saw that it would be impossible for him to overhear their conversation. Even if he could leave his present cover, there was nothing near the church to conceal him.

"I wish I could get inside the church and listen from the window, but that, of course, is impossible. The building must be locked. Well, I'll stay here and see what they do when they're through talking. Somebody ought to know, and I am the only person that suspects their in-

tention to do evil. I'll watch them!" the boy Shadow decided.

Half an hour passed, during which time they walked slowly back and forth talking earnestly, and then they moved to the rear entrance to the church.

Luke watched, still unsuspecting of their purpose, but suddenly started as the door swung back. From what he had seen, he knew that Tripp had forced the lock, and it became clear that something important was about to occur.

What was it? Were they going to burn the church?

This idea seemed absurd, and he abandoned it; but, as they had entered the building, he determined to see more. Quickly removing his shoes, like a veritable shadow he crept toward the door. Reaching it, he saw Lorimer and Tripp several yards away.

Acting on an impulse, the wide-awake boy also entered and took refuge in a pew. From there he watched eagerly.

Tripp had produced a bull's-eye lantern, and was fumbling at the lock of another door, while his companion held the light. There was a sudden click, and then the clerk chuckled and opened the door.

He passed inside, and Lorimer saw for the first time that he had left the outer door open. He returned, closed and locked it—for the key was inside—then went back near the pulpit.

Luke did not like this, for he practically was a prisoner, but dared not retreat, and had become very much interested in what the men were doing.

Tripp now returned with the light and a large, dusty book, the latter of which he laid down and began turning the leaves rapidly. Lorimer looked over his shoulder.

Suddenly the clerk paused.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "Look! there is the record!"

The young Shadow peered over the top of the pew and watched eagerly.

"Sure enough," Lorimer replied; "all is as you have stated. We now have only to tear it out and the record is gone forever. The sooner we do it, the better, for I tell you this business don't suit me."

He gave one leaf a quick, strong pull, tearing it entirely away, and then added:

"Put away the book. Leave all, as near as you can, as we found things, and then let us get away from here. I feel as though danger is menacing us, and if we were discovered, nothing short of the discoverer's death would insure our safety!"

He turned toward the door. The spy had ducked his head and was not conscious of making any noise, but, to his dismay, Lorimer suddenly bounded over the top of the pew and seized him by the throat!

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN IN THE GRAVEYARD.

THE lawyer's movements had been too quick for Luke to evade him, and, indeed, he was taken wholly by surprise. He had used all possible care, for he realized that men who would stoop to such work as theirs, might not hesitate to commit worse crimes; the dim old church exercised an influence of its own far from cheerful.

When the lawyer so unexpectedly sprung into the pew and seized the spy, a full sense of his danger flashed upon the boy Shadow. Lorimer had said that, in case they were discovered, only the death of the discoverer would make them safe.

The grip of his hands now indicated that he intended to carry out his threat.

"This way!" he exclaimed, addressing Tripp. "Here is a cursed spy. We have been shadowed! Quick, this way!"

Terror gave sudden strength to Luke. Justly or not it flashed upon him that murder would be done when they saw who he was, and with the fury of a wildcat he sprung at Lorimer.

Blow after blow he planted on the red, puffy face, and the man, amazed and confused, staggered back against the side of the pew. There, however, he found only the unfastened door for support, and as it gave way he went over on his back, flat in the aisle.

When he fell, his grasp was broken, and Luke, free at last, darted toward the door.

Marmaduke Tripp had heeded his employer's call, and, as he saw the flying figure, he rushed to capture it, his long legs covering space remarkably fast.

It was a thrilling crisis, for Luke's future hung poised on his chance of passing the door uncaught, and nobody could say then whether he would win or lose.

He seemed likely to reach the door first, but it was locked. Could he turn the key and pass through in time to save himself?

The question was solved quicker than he had expected. In his headlong haste Marmaduke was not careful of his footing, and he suddenly caught his toe in the carpet and went down in a heap, breaking the bull's-eye lantern into fragments.

When he regained his feet the door was wide open and the Shadow gone, and there stood the two men alone, startled and demoralized!

Luke had turned the key and gained open air, but even there he did not pause. It occurred to him that his enemies would most naturally expect him to take to the street for safety; so, instead, he ran up the slope of the graveyard until near the middle, and then dropped on the ground beside one of the marble slabs.

From there he watched and listened, but distance and darkness were so against him that he saw nothing for at least ten minutes.

Then a dim light shone from the church window, and he suspected that Lorimer and Tripp had lit one of the lamps belonging there, to remove all trace of their visit.

He dared not watch them further near by, so he waited for the light to disappear. Sooner or later he must venture near the church, for his shoes were still concealed in the bushes. Only for that he would have hurried away at once, for he had evidently learned the object of the schemers' visit.

It had been to tear the leaf from that dusty old book. What did they want of it? According to what they said at the time, some record was on it, and this record must be destroyed to make safe their attempt to foist Percy Littleton upon the world as Lionel Beringbrooke's heir.

Just what the record was Luke did not know, but he determined to learn. His friendship so well begun with the old sexton must be made to serve him.

At thought of the old man, he looked around and saw that he was almost where they had stood when talking. He looked at the gravestone beside which he crouched.

It was that of William Hallock, the suicide!

What strange chance had brought the friendless, troubled boy to the grave of the friendless, wretched man who had rashly taken his own life when his sorrows became unbearable?

"Poor fellow! I wonder what his trouble was? If his grave was defaced because he was a suicide, by people too vulgarly proud to tolerate his presence here, it was a shame! Mother always said that the dead should have but one judge, and He their Maker."

Turning his gaze again toward the church, the boy saw that the light had disappeared; and he was about to move that way when a heavy step on the walk, and not far away startled him.

Was it one of his enemies? He sprang up, and then, as he distinctly saw the figure of the approaching man, dropped behind a rose-bush and gravestone but a few feet away.

The unknown came nearer and then paused by the suicide's grave—unknown, because the boy Shadow plainly saw that it was neither the lawyer nor Tripp.

Having paused, he stooped and ran one hand down the surface of the gravestone. Next he lit a match, and, by its rays, continued his examination, while Luke tried in vain to get a view of his face.

The match went out, and the man stood erect.

He muttered, and the words were borne to the ears of the crouching boy.

"Sure enough, it has been mutilated, but who could have done it? Who, except me, would have a motive? Probably it was some reckless boy, for nobody else would give a thought to the grave. Well, well, well! you sleep under an unnamed stone after all, and the Hallock lie will flaunt itself no more. I wish the grave and all it contains could be as easily swept away."

The speaker leaned one elbow on the stone and looked thoughtfully down at the mound, while Luke hardly breathed, so interested was he.

In the name of all that was strange, who was this man who was muttering here at such an hour? Clearly, not Lorimer nor Tripp, but one, it seemed, who must have known as much about the suicide as they.

Several things he had said were deeply significant, and in his voice was something at once harsh, cold and sneering. No friend of the dead man was he, if Luke judged aright, and his way of leaning on the stone and looking at the mound seemed to express great satisfaction that it was so.

If he had remained where he was, all would have been well, but he suddenly moved toward Luke's cover. His object was undoubtedly a trivial one, but the boy did not think of that then.

His repeated adventures had made him nervous, and, fearing that he was discovered, he sprang up with the intention of taking to his heels.

Quicker than his own movements, however, were those of the man. No sooner had Luke risen than a yell pealed from the stranger's lips, and, wheeling, he darted away like one pursued by a deadly foe.

Luke stood riveted to the ground, staring in blank wonder. What had he done to frighten away an able-bodied man? Surely he had the most cause to be frightened.

Then the boy suddenly remembered the hour, the fact that the man had probably supposed himself alone by the grave. Was this enough to frighten him so?

"Not if he's got a clear conscience," thought the boy, and this brought back to mind the strange muttering of the unknown.

His words had revealed a hatred for the dead man; for him who had been to all the neighborhood a nameless suicide, and so buried. Could it be that this night prowler had known him of old, and as he really was?

Luke hesitated for a moment, anxious to follow and see if he could discover the man again, but well aware that there was danger in trying. This deterred him but a moment, for he was of a daring nature, and he followed the course of the runaway.

A short walk took him to the further side of the graveyard, but not a sign could he see of the stranger.

"Well, I think I'll have to let him go. Probably it don't amount to anything, but if I was a man, and had a clear conscience, I don't believe I'd run away like that."

He turned down the inclosure and looked for Lorimer and Tripp, but, as he had expected, found nothing. The men had disappeared, the church door was again locked, and he seemed to be the only person near.

As he did not seem likely to learn more by remaining there, he secured his shoes and started back toward the city.

On the way he reviewed the occurrences of the night.

Lorimer and Tripp had surely put themselves in the grasp of the law, but with what motive? What was the leaf they had stolen from the church? This he could not tell until he had seen the old sexton again—which he intended to do the next day—but it must be something connected with the case they had undertaken.

What was Luke going to do about it? So far he did not feel justified in giving evidence against the men, and he concluded to investigate further, and alone.

The great question now became, had he been recognized in the church? If not, he wanted to continue work at the office; if he was known as the Shadow, it would not be safe to go near Lorimer. His first impression was strengthened by meditation, and he decided that discovery had been actually impossible in the dark church.

He was safe enough in continuing work, and this he resolved to do in such a way that the lawyer would suspect nothing.

He arrived late at his room, but not so late as to discourage a would-be visitor who, it seemed, had been waiting for him. A rap at the door was followed by the entrance of Ebenezer Hare, who promptly accepted the invitation to sit down.

"Well, Luke," he said, after a little preliminary talk, "how do you get along at the office?"

"No fault has been found with me, sir, and I rather like the work," the boy replied.

"Of course you like Mr. Lorimer?"

Hare asked the question with his eyes turned keenly on Luke's face, as though he would read his very thoughts, but the boy never wavered.

"Well, of course I haven't become much acquainted with him, but, as I said, he uses me well."

"Just so; and he will continue to use you well. He appreciates a level-headed person, old or young."

Luke did not feel at ease, for Hare seemed trying to analyze him, and it occurred to him that the old man might be working for Lorimer, and endeavoring to solve some suspicion, but he managed to hide all his doubts and answer naturally.

"Do you see much of the clerk, Mr. Tripp?" the landlord continued.

"Oh! yes."

"What do you think of him?"

"Well, I guess he is all right. He's pleasant to me. But you know, I don't work for him."

"You don't speak so enthusiastically of him as you do of Mr. Lorimer. Come, confess that you don't like him."

There was a trace of eagerness in Hare's voice now, and Luke wondered more than ever what he was working around to.

"Don't you like him?" he bluntly asked.

A sudden flash leaped into Hare's eyes, but it was gone as soon as it came.

"Well I don't advise you to make friends with him."

"Why not, Mr. Hare?"

"He might not be a safe guide for one of your years."

"I don't intend that he shall be my guide," Luke answered, more emphatically than he intended.

"No? Good! good!" and the landlord rubbed his hands together briskly. "You have come to a wise conclusion; it is just as well that you don't make too friendly with him. Between you and me, he is not such a worthy man as Mr. Lorimer. Of course, a hint to a level-headed boy like you is enough. Now, isn't there a small desk in the inner office which Tripp has in private?—a desk in which he keeps a good many papers of his own?"

"Mr. Tripp has a private desk, sir, but I don't know what he keeps in it."

"Does he keep it locked?"

"Yes, sir."

"And never open it?"

"Oh! yes, I've seen him open it several times."

"Didn't you see what was inside?"

"I think there were papers, like any desk."

"Does he act jealous of it?—act as though he was afraid some one else would see inside?"

"I don't know about that— Wait! now you speak of it, I believe that when I once approached him, as he was looking in the desk, he closed it with a bang, and sharply asked what I wanted."

Luke was sorry for this confidence, as soon as it was given; the more so because Mr. Hare's face suddenly became eager.

"Ha! Aha!" he exclaimed, with the old smile around his eyes, and the corners of his mouth drawn very low. "He did, eh? I am not surprised. Well, now, Luke," and the speaker drew his chair nearer his companion's,

"I've helped you some, haven't I?"

"You secured me a situation when I most needed it, Mr. Hare."

"And you are grateful?"

"Certainly sir."

"Well, now, my boy, can't you arrange it somehow that you and I can enter the office secretly, some night, and see what is in Tripp's desk?"

CHAPTER V.

THE BOGUS HEIR APPEARS.

LUKE started back in surprise and indignation. His faith in Hare had wavered since he learned that the landlord had deceived him in regard to Lorimer, but he was not prepared for such a proposal as this.

"What! sir, go in as burglars?" he cried.

"My dear boy, this is not the way to look at it," said Hare, deprecatingly. "You are employed there, you know."

"But I have no right to enter the office except in business hours, much less at night, and secretly."

"Not even with a good purpose?"

"I don't see how such a term could be applied to what the law calls breaking and entering. What do you care about what is in Marmaduke Tripp's desk?"

"I care a good deal," was the curt reply.

"Then why not ask him?"

"Ah! but that would not do," said Ebenezer, in his old bland, confidential manner. "It must be done secretly, don't you see?"

"Even if I was to agree, how are we to enter without a key?"

"The key hangs in the office during the day, don't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will come to the door with the material for taking an impression of it, and you can pass it out; I will take the impression and then have one made like it."

"Not with my help," declared Luke, sturdily.

"What would Mr. Lorimer say to a friend, like you, who proposed to enter his office like a burglar?"

"My dear boy, my dear boy," expostulated Hare, "we will not touch Lorimer's property at all. It is only Tripp's desk."

"What is in his desk that you want?" again asked Luke, bluntly.

"Not money, I assure you."

"Well, it would be just as bad to take other things."

Ebenezer sighed dismally.

"Now, I wouldn't think this of a level-headed boy like you—and after all I've done for you! Suppose I was to tell you that Marmaduke Tripp is a bad man, and that I wish to right another man—a noble one—whom he has wronged?"

It was not Mr. Hare's pathos, though that was indescribably harrowing, even as his expression was harrowingly mournful, which made a sparkle leap into Luke's eyes. He thought of the scheme of which he had an inkling, and wondered if Hare knew of it.

"Has it occurred since I've been in the office?" he guardedly asked.

"Oh, no; years ago, and—"

The landlord stopped abruptly, as though he had said too much, and then added:

"It is an old affair, but I can't tell you about it now. Still, I assure you that justice ought to be done, and, knowing me to be a man of irreproachable character, as you do, such a level-headed boy as you ought to be willing to aid the cause of right."

It was on Luke's lips to say that he was tired of having the term "level-headed" applied to him as a means of over-persuasion, but it suddenly occurred to him that, situated as he was, he needed a level head, and he resolved to try strategy on Hare.

Possibly, if the landlord was strongly opposed to Tripp—and from his unguarded facial expression, now and then, the boy suspected that the dislike might even reach bitter hatred—he could be used as an ally in the case upon which he had stumbled.

Considering all this, Luke answered very shrewdly for one so young; expressed a desire to do all he could to help any one who had been wronged; spoke of his gratitude to Mr. Hare; and ended by asking for a few days in which to consider the matter.

The landlord believed that victory was half won and his eyes sparkled perceptibly, but he was shrewd enough not to press the matter then.

He said a few words calculated to enlist his supposed dupe's sympathies still more, and then took himself out of the room.

He would have been less confident had he seen the look of indignation which swept over Luke's face when the door was closed.

"So that is why he secured me a place!" thought the boy, his eyes flashing. "He had designs on Tripp's desk, and got me into the office merely as his tool! Well, I am dealing with a pretty lot of rogues all around, and they must either think me a rascal, myself, or as weak as putty in their hands. Perhaps they can make me a party to their crimes, and perhaps not! So Hare would make a burglar of me! Well, I'm afraid he will get badly left. I'll try to show him, and Lorimer, too, whether I am level-headed, or not!"

Luke went to bed, but, before he fell asleep, he puzzled long over three questions:

What paper had Lorimer and Tripp stolen from the church?

Who was the man he had seen in the graveyard?

What were the papers which Hare wished to get from Tripp's desk?

He reached no satisfactory answer, but fell asleep with a strong determination to go on and learn more about the strange affair—to become a veritable shadow, and run the truth down at all hazards.

If he was unsuspected he would continue at the office, and gain all the information he could.

When he reached Lorimer's in the morning the clerk was already there, but the lawyer did not come around until late. When he did, Luke saw with some alarm that the blows he had dealt his employer in the church, in his efforts to escape, had left their mark. One eye was partially blackened, and on the side of his nose was a bruise.

Luke felt alarmed: the more so because Lorimer was in very bad temper; but his coolness soon returned. Not only did the men show no signs that they suspected him to be the Shadow in the church, but a few words caught from a low conversation between them, in which both agreed that "he must have been a tramp," put him a good deal more at ease.

Both the plotters, however, seemed troubled

about something, and they held a long consultation in the subdued manner so suddenly adopted.

Several times, when they were busy, Luke glanced toward Tripp's private desk, which, as usual, was fast closed. What was in it that Hare so much desired? What did all the mystery mean, anyhow?

About three o'clock in the afternoon a man walked into the office and up to Lorimer's chair. He was, it seemed, about forty-five years old, but his garments when new would have been more appropriate to one a score of years younger—when new, for, like himself, they had left youth behind, and were decidedly seedy.

Despite this, the man had the airs of a sport, and his stylish cane, boyish hat and small, waxed mustache were all of the sort adored by a dandy. He carried himself mincingly, and might have been mistaken for a harmless old "swell," had it not been for a certain air which might be called icy composure, and a latent expression of face which was hard, calculating and cruel.

Reaching the lawyer, he deliberately said:

"You sent for me, and I am here."

Lorimer looked at him doubtfully.

"I haven't the honor of your name," he answered, curtly.

"No? Well, I am Peter Littleton, gentleman of leisure."

The lawyer quickly arose.

"My dear sir, I am glad to see you—glad to see you. So you received my message?"

"Informing me that if I would call I should hear something to my advantage. Just so. Well, I don't throw blessings over my shoulder this year. What's the row? Have I been appointed to a fat Government posish?"

Mr. Littleton had seated himself, both hands in the pockets of his sack-coat, and his cane pointing up from one of them like a telegraph-pole.

Everybody in the office had grown interested. Luke knew that he was not only looking at the father of the boy who had been a vicious rival in business, but at the father of the boy whom Lorimer and Tripp proposed to make the bogus heir of the Beringbrooke wealth.

"Nothing of that kind," the lawyer replied, "but a good deal better thing."

"Better? Egad! you must—but go on, go on. Explain! Elucidate! Divulge! Belch it out!"

"Mr. Littleton, if I can put you in the way of a fortune—ready-made, understand—are you willing to pay handsomely for it?"

"Egad! you shall have one-eighth of all the bullion you can entice to my pocket."

"Do you mean it?"

"Do I? Sir, look at me! Behold my rags, my squalor, my woe, my misery! Behold them, and then ask, if you can, if I will hesitate to reward in princely form the man who will restore to a gentleman of leisure the glittering magnificence of a past long lost in a career of horrible want and woe!"

Here Mr. Littleton flourished his cane around his head tragically, but a cold sneer ran through his extravagant speech. There was more than absurdity in his manner.

"And you promise to pay me one-eighth of what money I may get you?"

The lawyer was sticking coolly to business, and paying no attention to tragedy.

"I do."

"Mr. Tripp, draw up an agreement."

Littleton looked a trifle uncertain as he saw this evidence of business, and he carefully read the paper brought him by Tripp.

"Hallo! what's this?" he asked. "We jointly and severally promise to pay, and so forth, such a share of the money or property that may be obtained for us. Who the dickens is 'we' and 'us,' and all that sort of thing? Am I a king or an editor, that I sign in the plural number?"

"We want your son's name below yours."

"The dickens you do! The name of a minor?"

"That's my whim."

Littleton threw down the paper.

"I sign nothing until I know all!" he declared.

"You will know nothing until you sign," coolly replied Lorimer. "Do you run any risk? You say you need money. Do you know of any way to get it? Are you asked to pay a cent unless we get what we claim we can get? Is there any chance for you to lose?"

"Egad! no, for I've nothing to lose. Well, I hate to think, for it's deuced hard work, so down goes my name."

He scratched it off with a flourish, and then resumed his old attitude.

"Fire away!" he added.

Lorimer glanced toward Luke; but, as the

boy seemed busy, lowered his voice a trifle and replied:

"You are, of course, aware that in England there is a good deal of so-called 'unclaimed money,' and property left by deceased persons there, to which no heir is known. Immense fortunes are so situated, and the business of finding the heirs occupies many men. There are those in this country who devote all their time to it, and find all they can do."

"Yes, I've heard of such cases, but those who try for these boodles might as well smite stones to secure water."

"To a certain degree you are right. Where a score, or a hundred people who *think* they are heirs, but cannot prove it, enter into such a quest, their case is most unpromising, but when the actual heirs are known—"

At this moment another person entered the office, and Lorimer motioned to Tripp to attend him, and invited Littleton to the inner room. The latter followed, but, as he reached the connecting door, his gaze fell squarely on Luke's face, and he came to a sudden halt and remained staring fixedly at the boy.

CHAPTER VI.

A SOUND BY THE BED.

Up to the time when this stare became apparent Luke had been secretly watching Littleton, but he now thought best to be as much interested in his work as he seemed to be.

Could he have continued watching, unseen by the man, he would have perceived surprise followed by uncertainty, and this by a flash of hostility; but in a moment Littleton was himself, and he passed through the door, which was closed by the lawyer.

This stopped all chance of Luke hearing more, and he wrote away mechanically and thought about the visitor. So far as he knew he had never seen him before, but it was not hard now to tell where Percy Littleton got all his disagreeable ways.

He was a "chip of the old block," except that time had given the elder Littleton a knowledge of men and of the world which made him more dangerous.

It was near the hour of closing when the door reopened and the two men came out.

Luke glanced at them and was convinced by their expression that they had arrived at a satisfactory agreement. It was not to be wondered at. Clearly, Littleton was not so overburdened with conscience that such a deed would trouble him.

The boy, however, was scarcely prepared for one swift passing glance, the glance Littleton shot at him; but that so filled with enmity and menace that Luke was startled.

Perhaps Littleton had not expected to find him looking, for he passed quietly on, said good-night to Lorimer and left the office.

That glance, however, haunted the boy. What had he done to incur the hostility it expressed? True, he and Percy were not friends, but no great trouble had occurred between them. Again, Littleton did not look like one liking to take up a boy's quarrel.

Little time was lost in closing the office, and then Luke was once more free. He reached the street and hurried away but did not see the figure which stepped from a doorway and followed him.

The pursuer was Peter Littleton, and the gaze he kept on the boy was not more friendly than the one in the office.

Luke did not return to Hare's house, but, anxious to see the old sexton of the Gray Stone Church again, set out for that place at once.

He arrived in due time, and found the old man busy in the graveyard, as before. On the way he had asked another boy what the sexton's name was and, learning that it was Jacob Harmon, he greeted him by it.

The sexton seemed pleased to see him, and soon mentioned that a rich man near by had promised to put a new stone over William Hallock's grave.

"By the way," he suddenly said, "you didn't drop a glove near there last night, did you?"

"A glove? No, sir; I did not have any with me."

"Some one else did, then, for I found an old one right here, by the suicide's grave, early this morning."

Luke remembered the man whom he had seen by the grave the previous evening, and became interested. If the stranger had lost the glove, it might yet lead to his identification.

"Was there any name on the glove, sir?"

"No."

"What kind of a one was it?"

"A yellow-colored kid, old and soiled."

"Have you it now?"

"It is at the house, awaiting a claimant. Do you think you know to whom it belongs?"

Luke was not sure that he ought to tell what he had seen the night before, so he replied that he merely asked from a motive of curiosity.

There was some further conversation, and the boy was about to approach the subject nearest his heart when Mr. Harmon suddenly said:

"I am now going to the church to do a little work. Would you like to look the place over?"

It was a chance Luke did not neglect, and they were soon inside the edifice. Instinctively the boy at once glanced around for signs of Marmaduke Tripp's broken lamp, but neither that nor any other litter was visible on the smooth, clean floor.

The sexton took him around and called attention to what he thought would be of interest, but Luke's gaze often wandered to the door of the small room from which Tripp had taken the book out of which the leaf had been torn.

As Mr. Harmon did not refer to it, he finally did so himself.

"That," explained the sexton "is where the records are kept."

"What kind of records?"

"Everything connected with the church for many years, except the most valuable papers. Our former pastor, who died two years ago, was a most systematic man, and all that was done during his pastorate of forty years is on record here."

While speaking, the old man had taken a key from a niche and unlocked the door. Luke saw a small room, in which were several piles of large blank-books, but they differed a good deal in size and shape, and he was not long in deciding from which pile Tripp had taken the volume.

He opened the book at the top with an air of carelessness.

The first leaf bore an inscription in bold letters, which was as follows:

"MARRIAGE REGISTER,
1880 TO 18—."

"In these books," explained Harmon, "are entered all the marriages performed since 1815. It is what may be called a supplementary record, as it is in addition to records usually made, and intended chiefly as a source of information for those who may have occasion to make research—historians and others. We have our regular records, but these are a part of the private history of the church, which we make as full as possible."

While speaking, the sexton had noticed that one of the books well down the line projected from the orderly position of the others, and he moved it into place.

Luke glanced at its back, upon which was a paper with a date:

"1865-6."

From the irregular position of the volume, Luke suspected that it was that from which he had seen the leaf stolen, and was anxious to settle the doubt. But how could he do so without attracting attention?

As though to help him, Harmon brought a duster and began brushing the books one after another, though there was little to remove.

Luke watched greedily, and when the book of "1865-6" was reached, lifted it and began turning the leaves, at the same time apologizing for doing so.

"Look at it all you wish," the sexton replied, "and I will attend to the others. It is not so old and curious as those below, but there is a good deal in it."

Luke turned the leaves with eager fingers, but took care not to exhibit haste.

He was not disappointed; something like half the distance had been gone over when he came to the remnant of the stolen leaf. The ragged edge yet remained where Phineas Lorimer had torn it out, and he knew that he had found the right place.

He looked at the date of the records which were on either side. All were of December, 1865. He had now gained one step in the quest, but what was on the missing leaf he did not know. Was it the record of Alfred Beringbrooke's marriage?

Considering that Tripp had said that it was necessary to destroy the record in order to cripple Alfred's heirs, in case any one should happen on the record, this seemed probable.

The young investigator was anxious to solve this question, but as he could see no way, he closed the book without reference to the abstracted leaf, and the pile was arranged as before.

He took little interest in the sexton's further proceedings, and when Harmon was ready to go,

he made no excuse to stay. The old man looked searchingly over the place, which he had that day neatly swept, and then they went away.

Luke at once moved homeward.

He went in deep thought.

That he ought to do something in regard to the plot he had chanced to learn was clear, but he shrunk from going to officials of law and had no honest friend whom he could consult.

What was he to do?

"If I could only get trace of Alfred Beringbrooke's heirs—Tripp says he left a family—I could tell them, and that would settle the whole case. But how can I do it? Tripp says he don't know where they are, and I'm sure I know of no way to trace them. I wish I did."

All the way home he was busily thinking on this subject, but he could see no way of finding the lost heirs. He did not even know where Alfred Beringbrooke lived when he was married, in 1865, and it was not likely that he could get the information from the Littletons.

If Peter was dishonest enough to take what really belonged to his brother-in-law's heirs, he would not give out anything which would lead to their discovery.

Luke reached his room and went to bed without seeing Ebenezer Hare. He was glad of this, for he feared that the landlord would press his point about overhauling Tripp's desk, and he had so far thought of no way to meet his proposition.

The boy soon fell asleep, despite the weight of care on his mind, and for some hours his slumber was peaceful. Finally, however, he awoke with an idea that something was wrong.

He glanced toward the window, through which came a faint light, and was surprised to see that, though he had left it down at the bottom, it was now raised as high as the lower sash would go.

Almost at the same moment there was a noise beside his bed, and it flashed upon him that some interloper was in the room.

He started up, but as he did so a dark form rose beside him, and before he could utter a cry, strong hands grasped his neck and he was borne violently back on the pillow.

CHAPTER VII.

LUKE LEARNS THAT HE HAS ENEMIES.

THE superior strength of the unknown rendered all Luke's struggles useless, and a savage voice hissed in his ear:

"Not a word, you young hound, or I'll shut off your wind completely."

He seemed liable to do this anyway, for his grasp was so harsh that the boy's throat seemed being torn to pieces. He gasped and kicked, but that was all he could do.

The strong hands relaxed a little.

"Now, see here, I don't care to harm you, if you keep still, though I'll carve you all up if you yell. I'm going to let go of your throat and bind you, but I've got a knife here, and I'll give it to you if you call out. Do you see it?"

He held one hand up between Luke and the window, and the knife was dimly visible. Sight of it did not terrify the boy, however, whose courage was up in arms. Young as he was, he did not propose to remain idle and let this burglar—or worse—have matters all his own way.

With a quick, sharp movement he struck the hand which held the knife, and the weapon went spinning across the room. Then Luke squirmed from under the man's other hand to the back of the bed.

The unknown uttered an oath and sprang after him. Then came a crash. The bed was old and weak, and the sudden strain was too much for it; down it went to the floor with a racket audible all over the house.

Again the interloper swore roundly, for, in addition to this noise, he had missed the boy. Luke sprang over the footboard, and then, as he saw his assailant rushing at him, seized a chair as a weapon.

There was no time for parley—he struck with all his force.

Down came the chair, and down went the man. He had been hit hard, and he went to the floor just as Luke raised his voice and shouted for help. Through the old house rung the cry, and he plainly heard Ebenezer Hare on the move.

Perhaps the unknown man heard the same thing; at any rate he clearly saw that his purpose was frustrated, and he struggled to his feet and made a rush for the window.

Luke followed, but without the least pause his late assailant sprang through.

The boy reached the window and looked out. He was just in time to see the unknown disap-

pearing around the corner. Although he had leaped from a second story window, the house was not high enough to make his risk so very great.

Hare now appeared and excitedly demanded the cause of the uproar, and the time consumed in telling him was such it was clear pursuit would do no good.

Whoever the man was, he had made off as safely as he had come, but investigation showed that nothing had been taken, and the object of his unlawful call was as much a mystery as ever.

Hare bewailed the misfortune to his bed, but when it was found to be slight, recovered his equilibrium enough to congratulate Luke on his escape, ascribing the adventure to an ordinary burglar.

Luke was by no means of this opinion, though he based his view of the matter more on presentiment than tangible evidence.

There was nothing in the whole house likely to gladden a burglar's heart; much less in his own room.

No, the boy felt sure that it had been a direct blow at him, and, once more, he was led to wonder if Lorimer and Tripp had suspected anything.

He was obliged to go to bed unsatisfied, and no further trouble occurred that night.

He was up bright and early, and, in moving about the room, he noticed on the floor a button which, certainly, had never belonged to him. Had the burglar lost it in the struggle? He examined it carefully, but it was an ordinary button and, except that it had probably come from a coat, revealed nothing.

Going outside he found the unknown's footprints plainly marked, and was studying their shape when a boy who lived in the next house, which was fifty feet away, approached.

"Hallo, Luke, what're you doing?"

"I think some burglar tried to break in last night," was the guarded reply.

"Gosh! you don't say so! Don't know what he expected to find in Eb Hare's rookery."

"You haven't seen anybody prowling around, have you, Sam?"

"No. Wait! I ain't sure but I have."

"When?"

"Last night."

"How was that?"

"Well, you see I was out all the evening, and when I got along here, coming home, a man was standing just about there, looking up. I looked up, too, and saw the light in your room, and then the man saw me and scooted."

"Run?"

"Well, it was a mighty lively walk."

Luke had grown a good deal interested.

"Can you describe him?"

"I don't know," was the dubious reply, "but I remember he looked like a dude, though he was as old as my father, I guess. He carried a cane and had a hat—a regular boy's hat—jammed down over one ear; and his coat was a short one. He came near being smooth-faced, for he only wore a mustache, and that looked like a rat's tail. 'Twas waxed, and drawn out so!"

The boy illustrated, while Luke could hardly conceal his amazement.

The description, as far as it went, might have been applied in every particular to *Peter Littleton*!

This fact flashed upon Luke at once, and with it came a recollection of the sharp, menacing gaze Tripp's candidate for the Beringbrooke money had given him in the office.

Could it be that he was the burglar? Could it be that he suspected the part Luke contemplated taking to prevent Lorimer's fraud from succeeding? Scarcely, for, in that case, he would notify the lawyer—yet, what meant the hostile glance, and the midnight invasion of his room?

He questioned his boy acquaintance further, but without getting more light on the subject.

The prowling man had not been seen by him after the events described.

After drawing the outline of the footprints on a piece of paper, Luke started for the office. Probably he could tell by Lorimer's and Tripp's manner whether they suspected him.

On the way he chanced upon Percy Littleton, who was selling papers on Chapel street.

The boy was a weak, effeminate fellow, of about fifteen years, but he tried to dress like a dandy, and had a ridiculous air of dignity. Moreover, he was of a vicious, treacherous nature, and Luke had always seen fit to have but little to do with him.

Now, a sudden idea struck him, and he walked directly to the boy, who looked at him suspiciously.

"Hallo! How's business, Percy?"

"Good," was the reply, while Littleton pressed his papers tightly together, so that the size of his unsold package would not be so perceptible. Then he slowly added: "Haven't seen you lately."

No; business was so poor with me, I left off for a while."

"Living on your income?"

There was a sneer in the inquiry, but Luke saw fit to wholly disregard it. He shook his head soberly.

"I find it hard to live at all."

Percy produced a cigarette and lit it with the air of a millionaire.

"I'm going to retire," he said loftily.

"Indeed!"

"Yes; we've had a huge fortune left us, and I'm going to take life easy. Keep your eye on me, and you'll see me eclipse those Yale students, who buy papers of me as though they were princes. Bah! what are they compared to the Littletons!"

"Is your family an old one?"

"Well, I should remark!" and Percy thrust his right thumb into the arm-hole of his vest and swung his fingers like a fan. "The Littletons are A1 stock, though—a—you see my father's ill-health has prevented his close application to business and society. On my mother's side," here Percy spoke slowly, as though his desire to pose as an aristocrat was leading him on to say what might not be wise, "ah! that's where the blue blood comes in. She was a Beringbrooke. Ancient old family—rich as Rothschild!"

"The name does sound aristocratic," agreed Luke, craftily.

"It fits like a glove. My mother knew what luxury and grandeur was. You know where Patsy Eagan lives?"

"Yes."

"Second house beyond there lives one Abner Groom. Ask him about the Beringbrookes. He was my grandfather's servant, and cared for my mother and—ahem! the rest of the family."

Luke believed that he understood what had been on Percy's lips when he checked himself. It was the name of his uncle, Alfred, whose descendants were the real heirs of the fortune left in England. Possibly, Percy had been warned by his father not to mention that uncle, but it was not in the boy's nature to avoid boasting to a rival in business.

At this moment a man on the opposite sidewalk motioned for a paper, and as Percy tripped daintily across to answer the call, Luke went on his way.

"So there is an old servant living!" he thought. "I'll see him, and if he is a decent fellow, I may learn something about Alfred Beringbrooke. Aha! Master Percy, if this turns out as I hope, it may be you have boasted once too often!"

Luke reached the office just in time, and once more he studied Lorimer and Tripp closely to see if there was anything to indicate that he was suspected. All seemed as usual, however, and some slight service which he performed with unexpected shrewdness led Lorimer to compliment him on his "finesse," and declare that such a level-headed boy was bound to make his mark.

In point of fact, the lawyer was pleased, and though he had not willingly let Luke into all the crookedness of his transactions, he believed that he had a boy who, under his teaching, would make a sharp and tricky aider in his knavish schemes.

The day passed without incident of importance, except that Tripp once left the office, leaving his private desk unlocked, and then returned hurriedly and in some evident trepidation to close it.

He looked sharply at Luke, but the latter was not near the desk, and seemed wholly absorbed in other work.

So Marmaduke locked the desk and went out again, leaving Luke to wonder what secret the plain old desk held.

He began to be as curious as Ebenezer Hare was anxious to see the inside.

When the office closed the boy started for his room.

He was moving through a quiet street, and looking carelessly at a close carriage which stood by the curb-stone, when some one ran against him.

Thinking that it was a drunken man he looked up quickly, but, as he did so, he was seized by strong arms, lifted and thrown inside the carriage. Then the vehicle whirled away, with Luke a helpless prisoner.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BIG MAN WITH THE WHIP.

THIS bold deed had been so unexpected, and had been done so quickly, that Luke had time neither to resist nor call for help; and, so quiet was the street, it did not seem to attract attention from any outsider.

By the time Luke recovered from his astonishment the carriage was moving rapidly away, and he was seated beside his powerful abductor.

The latter ostentatiously displayed an ugly-looking knife and growled:

"Just you keep quiet, my young banty, or I'll give you five inches of this!"

There was that in his face which showed he would keep his word, and the prisoner dared not make an outcry. He was cooler than might be expected, however, and he indignantly exclaimed:

"How dare you molest me? What are you trying to do, anyway?"

"That's my business."

"I should say it was mine, too."

"Your business is to keep your jaw still. No yelling, do you hear? I mean business, every time; and I'd just as soon knife you as to eat. I'll do it, too, if you try to give the alarm."

"What do you want of me?"

"Want you to go with us."

"Where?"

"You'll see, later."

"Haven't you made a mistake?"

"Not a mistake."

"Well, I'd like to know what you want of me, and where you're taking me."

Luke was growing cooler every minute, and his voice had a firmness which was not to be expected, considering that the big kidnapper held the knife close to his body all the time.

One thrust would be fatal, and there was no mercy in the burly ruffian's face.

"Don't you try to know too much," he growled.

"You'll get the tip soon enough, and don't you think you won't. I ain't going to talk any more, so you may as well hush your chinning and wait till you're asked to talk."

There was no other way to do, and Luke sat in silence. The carriage was whirling away; he did not know where; and to what fate he was being taken was equally a mystery.

Who were his captors? He did not remember ever seeing them before, but he *did* remember the events of the previous night, and wondered if Peter Littleton had a hand in this fresh outrage.

"Can't imagine why he's so down on me, unless he knows that I've been to the Gray Stone Church, and if he was 'onto' that fact, I should suppose he'd tell Lorimer. It's all a mystery to me."

For nearly an hour the carriage rolled on, and then a sudden increase of darkness, and the pounding of the horse's feet on wood showed that they had entered a stable or something of the kind.

His captor spoke again:

"We get out here, but I want to caution you again to keep your mouth shut. You won't be harmed if you are wise enough to act sensibly; but this place isn't going to be sized up by you, and you—but you'll see. Here we get out."

The speaker opened the carriage door, alighted and pulled Luke after him.

They were in a drive-way to which came the odor of a stable; but the guide turned the other way, toward a rude door in an equally rude, white-painted brick wall.

Luke felt a strong temptation to try and wrench away, but the drive-way had been closed and an effort would be lost time.

Consequently he entered the house quietly.

Night had clearly fallen, and they groped their way through a dark hall and then up a stairway. Luke judged they were in the house of people who cared nothing for cleanliness, for the odor was anything but sweet.

At the head of the stairs they entered a poorly-furnished room in which was burning a kerosene lamp.

"Sit down!" ordered the man.

Luke obeyed.

"You needn't be squinting around; there ain't no loophole for escape," his captor roughly added.

The boy did not answer. Perhaps five minutes passed, and then a rap sounded at the door. The big man answered it, and several whispered words passed between him and the unseen. Then the latter entered.

Luke looked at him in surprise. Boots and pants showed near, and on, the floor, but from his neck to his knees he was enveloped in a

shawl, old and faded, through which openings had been made for his arms! At the neck this was met by another cloth which completely covered the man's head, except that holes were left for his eyes.

It was a fantastic costume, but Luke understood at once that it was intended to serve as a complete disguise for the face, head and form of the wearer.

While he was looking blankly, the big man had prepared a cord, and he now told Luke to put his hands behind him. The prisoner hesitated, but the murderous-looking knife was again produced and he said nothing.

His hands were bound, and then the masked man advanced, but Luke stepped back a pace.

"Look here," he said, "I'd like some light on this matter. The other man won't talk, but perhaps you will. What does all this mean, anyhow?"

The masked man shook his head and motioned to his ally, who stepped behind Luke and grasped both arms. Then the silent man thrust his hand into Luke's pockets.

"If you're after money, you'll fare badly," said the boy, actually smiling. "I haven't fifteen cents about me, as you'll see."

Not a word answered the masked man, but, slowly and carefully, he went through every one of the prisoner's pockets. He found absolutely nothing of value, and finally drew back and stood as though in thought.

"Perhaps I can help you out," lightly suggested Luke, who never lost his "nerve."

The masked man motioned his ally aside, where they talked several seconds in subdued voices. Then the big man turned to Luke.

"Where's that glove?" he asked.

"What glove?"

"The one you found the other day."

"I haven't found any."

"Didn't you find one in the graveyard?"

A quick look of intelligence came to Luke's face. The question explained and suggested a good deal. He remembered the man he had seen by William Hallock's grave; his flight; the glove found the next day by the old sexton; and he remembered, too, the night visitor to his chamber. Had that person come for the glove, under the belief that the boy had it?

According to his theory, the interloper had been the elder Littleton. Was the masked man he, also?

"Aha! I see you *do* know something about the glove," said the big man.

Luke hesitated for a moment, and then answered:

"I found no glove, but somebody else did."

"Who?"

"I'll tell that when you let me go."

"You'll tell now."

"No, I shall not!" was the firm reply. "I've got something to say about this matter, myself, and you can't have the sole voice in the case. I've never seen the glove, and don't care a cent about it. Let me go, and I'll tell all about it."

The big man glanced at his masked companion, who shook his head. The former then replied:

"We make no terms with you. You must tell now."

"I decline."

"Suppose I take a horsewhip to you?"

"That won't do any good."

"Do you mean to say you'd rather be whipped than to talk? Mind you, every blow will cut the skin."

"I don't believe I should fare any better after telling," Luke firmly replied, "and I ask for a fair show. As I said, the glove is of no use to me, and I'll tell who has it if you will set me free. Tell it here I will not, and if you do me any harm, you'll never get your precious glove."

His fearless, stubborn air had its effect on the men, who then held another consultation. It was brief, and then the big man stooped and drew a heavy whip from under the old sofa.

He cracked this above his head, and then passed it over to his companion.

"We'll see whether you'll talk!" he growled, and, catching the prisoner, threw him down across the sofa. "We ain't to be fooled with, and we'll cut you into pieces if you are stuffy. Oh! it won't do you any good to squirm. Hear the whip crack! It's a wicked thing, you bet! Now, will you talk?"

"No."

"Then strike!" cried the big man, with an oath.

CHAPTER IX.

LEFT TO A TERRIBLE FATE.

THE whip cracked again over Luke's head, but it did not fall.

"For the last time," added the big man, "will you talk? Think how small a thing we ask, and how terrible the alternative is. That whip will cut like a knife. Tell us all about the glove and you can go."

Luke sincerely believed himself safest while he refused to tell. If they wanted the information, they would not do him any great harm; but, if he spoke, his value to them would be gone, and there was no knowing to what fate he would be consigned.

"I haven't a word to say," he answered.

Again the whip cracked.

Luke expected to feel it on his back, but not a blow came. The smaller man made a motion, and the big one jerked Luke to his feet.

"You young fool!" he exclaimed, "don't you think you are out of this so nicely. You'll never leave this house until you speak out—unless you go as a corpse!"

He looked at the boy with evil eyes as he spoke, but Luke did not waver. He was gaining fresh confidence every minute, and that he had great natural courage was clear.

"You'll see that this room is fitted up as a prison," the big man added; "windows boarded up, and all that sort of thing. You can't escape anyhow, but if we hear you trying, we'll come in and give you a taste of the whip. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Well, see that you heed it. Give some time to meditation, too, for not a morsel of food passes your lips—not a drop of water—till you do speak. It's talk or starve. Take your pick, and when you decide to speak and tell all, pull yonder cord. It will ring a bell and summon us."

With these parting words they left the room, and Luke was alone in his prison. His first move was to try and wrench his wrists free, but the cords defied all his efforts.

Clearly, he could not remove them without means not at his command.

He then looked about his room. It had evidently been carefully prepared, and was strong enough for its present use. Even had his hands been free, he could not have escaped unless by battering down the door, and that would have been heard by his enemies.

"Well, I guess I'm in a fix, sure!" he muttered. "Talk about your French Bastille—I'm in a Nutmeg State Prison that's strong enough for my use. Can't get out, nohow, so I think I'll sit down and meditate, as that big villain advised, but hardly in the vein he spoke of. It'll be a cold day when I give in!"

He sat down and began thinking.

Was the disguised man Peter Littleton?

He believed "yes" to be the proper answer to the question, and that the main facts of the case were about as follows:

Littleton was the man he had seen in the grave-yard, and he had lost a glove there. Probably before dark of that evening he had seen Luke wandering around near the Gray Stone Church, and had got the idea that he had found the lost glove.

The following day he had seen Luke in Lorimer's office, and had looked surprised and afterward menacing. Next came the invasion of the room at Hare's, and the other boy's statement that he had seen a man prowling about, whose description fitted Littleton. Had he been there to get what he now demanded—the glove?

All this made a continuous story, taking it for granted that the masked man was Littleton; but a perplexing question now arose.

What was there about the glove which made its recovery of such vital importance?

Here Luke was wholly at sea.

Study all he might, no satisfactory explanation could be found.

The sexton had said that the glove was old and soiled, and it was strange that such an uproar should be made about it.

"There's more in this matter than appears on the surface," thought the boy, "and if I can get out of here I'll proceed to investigate the best I know how. After all this, I think I have a personal motive for trying to keep Littleton out of the fortune which don't belong to him. I'll just go to work to hunt up Alfred Beringbrooke's heirs, and if I am as level-headed as Lorimer says, I may surprise them yet. Hello!"

He broke off suddenly as the key rattled in the door, supposing that one of the men was returning, but a surprise awaited him.

Instead, there entered a slender, pale-faced woman who looked like anything but a criminal.

She placed one hand over her lips, to enjoin silence, and then quickly advanced toward him. He saw with some surprise that she was tremb-

ling, and her eyes had a terrified expression which haunted the boy long afterward.

"Not a word!" she exclaimed. "Don't speak, as you value your life, or they will overhear you. Quick!—your hands! Let me free you."

Before he had fully recovered his coolness, she had severed the cords with a knife.

"Now, get away from here as soon as possible. If they discover you, it is sure death; you don't know them as I do. Come, come!"

She was hurrying him toward the door, but, by this time, he had recovered his powers of speech.

"Who are you that is helping me?"

"Never mind; only get away."

"Do you belong here?"

"Yes."

"But won't they suspect you?"

"Never mind me; get away at once. Here is the door—go!"

She had conducted him down the stairs and to a door different from the one where he entered the house. Beyond was the open air, but it had occurred to him that something terrible might occur when the woman's work was discovered by the men, whom she was clearly playing false, and he still hesitated.

"Won't you go, too?"

"No."

"But will you be safe?"

"Never mind me—go, go!"

With a quick motion she pushed him clear of the door, which she then closed and locked behind him. He had no choice in the matter, and though her pale face haunted him, he lost no time in getting away from the house.

Where he was he did not know, though it was clearly beyond the city proper. No lights were visible near at hand, so he started briskly off toward the nearest, anxious to get an idea of his exact situation.

The way was rough and treacherous, and it was not until he had had many a tumble that he neared the light.

It proved to come from a small house on a bank, at the foot of which Luke plainly saw a railroad track. From this he surmised that he was nearly north of the city, and that this was the track of the Hartford or Northampton Road. If he could learn which way was to, and which from, New Haven, he could follow the track back to the city.

Acting on this idea, he moved toward the house after a pause, and, seeing that a window-curtain was up, crept to that point with the hope of getting a view of the interior.

If more ruffianly-looking men were there, he did not care to make himself seen.

Only an unoccupied room met his gaze; but, it was so clear that the people must be near, he waited for them to appear. Unfortunately for him, some one else came first.

Without the least warning he was seized by strong hands from behind; a roll of cloth was stuffed into his mouth, his arms pinioned to his sides, a blanket thrown over his head, and then he was borne away.

He kicked and twisted vigorously, but all in vain. He was conscious that the men went down the bank to the railroad track, and there they paused and began a consultation of which he could hear nothing.

It soon ended, and then the blanket was removed from the prisoner's head. As he had expected, he was again in the hands of those who had abducted him before.

This time there was no parley. He could not speak, and the men did not, but they occupied their time so well that, in a little while, a plan which they had formed was brought to consummation.

And this was the situation:

Luke Hartley was bound to the railroad track, in the very path of passing trains. The object of his enemies could not be mistaken. His escape had angered and alarmed them, and they had doomed him to death.

The manner of securing him was peculiar. He lay flat on his back between the rails, with hands and feet outstretched in spread-eagle style, and bound to the rails.

He would have been wholly prostrate had not his head been elevated and pillowed on a timber somewhat larger than a tie, which they had laid across the track, an end on each rail, and secured to his neck.

As a result of all this, an approaching train would first strike the timber and drive it against Luke's neck and shoulders with a force the result of which was shocking to think of.

When all this was done, a strong gag was substituted for the cloth in the boy's mouth, and their work was finished.

The big man tapped Luke on the shoulder.

"You see the result of bucking against us. Had you been sensible, nobody would have harmed you, but you have sealed your own fate. In half an hour the train for New Haven will pass, and then you will be ground to pieces. You will have time to think it over and repent of your folly, but repentance will do no good now. We shall not come back, and when the engine drives this timber against you, it will soon be over—and you will need no undertaker. Good-by, my boy, and may your thoughts be pleasant!"

A mocking laugh followed this speech, and then the man and his silent companion moved up the bank and disappeared in the darkness.

Luke was left alone, and in a situation which might well appall the stoutest heart. The coming of the train meant death to him, and it would be no great while before it would come.

He struggled with his bonds, but they were not to be broken or started. He tried to call for help, but the gag prevented more than a muttering or moaning which, he knew, could not be heard more than a few feet away.

Helpless! All his exertions would be useless, and there was little chance that any one would pass that way at so late an hour.

Several minutes passed; how many he knew not, but it seemed to be hours. Then a singing sound seemed to run along the rails. Cold perspiration started to his face. Well did he know what that sound meant.

A train was approaching!

Louder grew the singing—it became a rumble, and then a roar. He could not look backward, but the whole track seemed thrilled with life under the tread of the iron monster.

Nearer and louder, and the glare of the headlight fell upon him. Once more he wrestled with his bonds, but in vain. He was secure, and no human power could free him now before the engine would reach him. He closed his eyes and awaited the end.

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD MAN OF THE COTTAGE.

WITH a terrible glare and glitter, and a crashing that no one not situated as Luke Hartley was can realize, the engine and the following cars thundered along the track. Leaving a mass of black smoke hovering over the place, it receded—was gone.

And what of Luke?

Had death come to him in a terrible form, but instantaneously, and with little bodily suffering?

No; he remained bound to the track, unharmed. The train had not been on the rails between which he was bound; it was not the Express train; but a number of freight-cars which had been run past on a side-track, so near that he might almost have touched them had his hands been free.

For a few moments after the train was gone he felt weak and uncertain. Then came a measure of hope, but this was succeeded in turn by the knowledge that he merely had a reprieve.

The Express train must be almost due, and when that came it would not be on the side-track. It would do the work marked out for it by the two ruffians, and Luke's life would go out like a candle.

"Better that the other train had done the work," he thought. "I have only the pain of waiting for the Express."

Once more he struggled to get rid of his bonds, but with no better success than before. He ceased his efforts with a feeling of utter despair.

"Great heavens!"

Without the least warning the words were spoken beside him. He looked up with a start. Some one was standing over him, and, though the darkness hid the man's face, he felt sure he was neither of his enemies.

The boy made an effort to speak, but it was only a hollow gurgle.

"What in the world is this?" the voice continued. "A man on the track—and bound! What terrible crime have I happened upon? My knife—"

There was a moment's pause and then one of Luke's hands was cut loose. He reached up and tore the gag from his mouth.

"Quick!" he exclaimed, as clearly as his strained jaws would permit. "Cut me loose, or the Express will kill me outright. I believe I hear it now!"

Not a word answered the rescuer, but his hands were busy, and, one after another, Luke's limbs were freed. When he was cut clear of the timber, he sprang up and dragged it from the track. The other train was in sight.

"What does all this mean?" the rescuer blankly asked.

But Luke, feeling weak and trembling, sat down on the bank and said nothing until the second train flashed by with a rush and roar. Had help been delayed a short time, nothing could have saved the boy.

Finally he raised his head and spoke:

"How did you find me?"

"Why, you see I was outside my house, and, when the freight-train passed, I saw by the glare of the headlight that something was on the other track. Supposing it to be wood of some sort accidentally dropped there I went down to investigate, when, to my utter surprise, I found you. But how *did* it happen?"

"I was bound there by enemies."

"The infamous wretches!"

"Do you live near here, sir?"

"Yes; in yonder little house."

"Will you let me go there a little while? I feel weak and almost overcome, and I want to know how to get back to New Haven. But I don't feel able to go now."

"My boy, you must not go to-night," was the earnest reply. "Come to my house and stay all night. Humble it is, I admit, but no unfortunate can say that Abner Groom turned him away."

Luke had started.

"What name did you say?"

"Abner Groom, is my name."

Luke felt elated. He remembered his late conversation with Percy Littleton, and Groom's words not only revealed where they were, but his companion was the man whom Percy had mentioned as the old servant of his grandfather.

As they had now reached the cottage door they entered in silence. Groom locked the door and drew down the curtains, while Luke looked at him closely and critically.

What he saw was highly satisfactory. Groom was well advanced in years, and his snow-white hair and beard framed in a face which was the embodiment of benevolence, kindness and honor. He did not seem to be a particularly intellectual man, but if he was not a good man, physiognomy was the most unreliable of sciences.

"The more I think of it," he suddenly said, "the more I am amazed to think that any one is base enough to have done such a deed. My poor boy, who tied you to the track?"

Luke was by no means ready to tell his suspicions, but, as he wanted Groom to talk freely, he made a show of frankness.

"That I don't know, for I did not recognize either man. Can it be they did it out of mere mischief?"

"Such a thing is possible, but only a fiend would do it."

"I can easily agree with you there."

"We must have officers on their track."

"Excuse me, but I'd rather trust it to a friend who is a private detective."

The latter person was an imaginary being, but Luke was not sure that he wanted his story blazed abroad just then. He wanted time to consider.

Groom promised to let him manage matters to suit himself, and then, learning that the boy had eaten no supper, made a cup of strong coffee, and set out bread and meat to be eaten with it.

Luke ate heartily, and was surprised to see how much better he felt. He was in condition to go home, but when the old man urged him to remain all night, he did not decline the invitation. He wanted to hear Groom speak on an important subject, and as they sat together, he skillfully brought conversation to the desired point by leading his host to speak of his younger days.

When he mentioned that he once worked for a man named Beringbrooke, Luke was ready.

"Beringbrooke!" he repeated. "Seems to me I've heard that name. Did he live in this city?"

"Yes, on Orange street."

"I suppose he was rich?"

Groom shook his head.

"No, poor gentleman; though he tried to keep up some style. He was in business, first on Chapel street, and then on Church; but he never made much money, and it all went in trying to keep up style. He was of a proud old English family, and his ill-luck here drove him to an early grave. To tell the truth, he was not very strong-minded."

"Did he have children?"

"Two!" replied the old man, with a sigh.

"Where are they now?"

"Dead!"

"And did they leave no children?"

"One—the daughter—did. She married a

man named Peter Littleton, and died young. Perhaps it was just as well for her, for, though an amiable girl, she was even less energetic and decided of mind than her father, so she would have been a mere cipher in the house; and by her death she missed the sorrow of seeing her only child become like his father—vain, shallow and vicious."

"Do you see them often?"

"No, no; nor do I care to. Mr. Littleton I have not seen for six years, and his son I see only in my rare visits to the city. I do not care to see him at all."

The old servitor's face and voice showed how deeply he regretted the condition of affairs.

"But the son of your old employer—what was his name?"

Groom's face became even more sad.

"Alfred."

"What became of him?"

"That I don't know; I wish I did. He may be living, but I think he is dead. Poor Alfred!"

"Would you mind telling me about him?" asked Luke, hiding his eagerness.

The old man hesitated for a moment.

"I will tell you, but it is something I would mention to but few. Alfred was more like his mother than like the Beringbrookes—that is, he was strong-minded, steady and resolute, and when he married and started out in life, I felt sure he would succeed."

"What was his wife's name?"

"Do you know, I was trying to remember it only a few days ago, but my memory is not what it was once, and the name is gone. Alfred had a playful habit of calling her 'Queenie,' and that is all I remember, though that was not her real name. I must go some day to the Gray Stone Church, where they were married, and get her actual name."

"Well, what became of them?"

Groom again sighed deeply.

"Alfred had a place with a business house on State street, and for a time all went well; but, one morning, the terrible news reached me that he was a forger and a fugitive."

"Ah!"

"Fugitive he was, but a forger—never, never! Men like him never stoop to crime; he was by far too noble. For some days I did not know where he was, and then I got a letter from him postmarked Portland, Maine. He said that, seeing the chances were all against him, he had taken his wife and fled, but that he was only in hiding to obtain time for investigation which should prove his innocence and reveal the real forger."

"What next?" Luke eagerly asked.

"I never heard from him again, and I can only conclude that he died before his investigation was finished, but that he was a forger I will never believe."

"Did you answer his letter?"

"Yes."

"But heard no more?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Did he have you address him under his own name?"

"No. I was to address him as William Hallock."

"What?"

Luke sprung to his feet. The name—William Hallock—was that which had been on the stone over the suicide's grave near the Gray Stone Church!

CHAPTER XI.

MARMADUKE TRIPP ASKS QUESTIONS.

No wonder Luke was surprised and startled, for, not only did he remember the story of the suicide, as told by the old sexton, but he remembered the muttered words of the man who had lost the glove by the grave—whom he now believed to be Peter Littleton—and the fact that he seemed to have a hatred for the dead man.

"What! have you heard the name?" asked Groom, in surprise.

Luke saw the need of strategy, and his quick wit served him well.

"Did you say his name was Locke?"

"No, Hallock; William Hallock."

"Oh! well, you see I know a young man, who is about twenty, who is named William Locke."

"He can have no bearing on the case."

"But if Alfred did not commit the forgery, who did?" continued Luke.

"I hardly dare speak my suspicion, but an inward voice always calls out: 'Littleton! Littleton!'"

"The husband of Alfred's sister."

"There were two Littletons—Peter and Robert. The latter had more force of character than Peter, and at an early age ran away to sea. He had been a wild, vicious boy, and rumor says grew worse as he became older, but only twice

was he home. Once was just before the forgery. When he came he kept very close to his brother's house, and it was rumored that he was hiding because of some crime. Shortly after he came back, Peter tried to have Alfred borrow money and then loan to him, so that he and Robert could go to South America and start business there. Alfred kindly refused, but Peter took offense, cursed Alfred and went away in a passion. Now, I believe, and I know Alfred thought the same, that the forgery was committed by the Littletons."

"But there is no proof of it?"

"None that I know of."

"And they have gone on safely, while Alfred was the only sufferer?"

"Scarcely that, for the man who took the forged check to the bank—Roger Perkins, a fellow employee—was tried as an accomplice and sentenced to ten years imprisonment. I think he died in prison."

"But is there no way to trace Alfred?"

"I know of none."

"Do you suppose he returned to New Haven?"

"That I don't know. His fate is shrouded in utter darkness."

"And his wife?"

"The same of her."

"Had they children?"

"No."

Luke was silent for a few moments. He remembered that Marmaduke Tripp had said that Alfred left a "family," and had used the plural number in speaking of that family. Did he really know more about Alfred's last days than Groom did? A year had passed since Alfred's flight before the time when "William Hallock" was found dead by the old Gray Stone Church. There might have been a child of whom Groom never heard.

At one time he felt a doubt that the suicide, Hallock, and the Hallock mentioned by Groom, were one, for it seemed strange that Alfred could kill himself in the city where he was so well known and not be recognized by any one, but further thought satisfied him that this could easily be.

Strange things happen in cities, and go down on official records as unexplained mysteries, when there are people almost within reach who might throw light on the case if they had any knowledge with the so-called mysterious part of the affair.

Other questions he asked of Groom, but none served to throw light on the affair, and after some further talk, he accepted the old man's invitation to sleep at the house and retired.

He did not at once fall asleep, however.

He was a good deal puzzled by Peter Littleton's conduct. Even if the latter had wronged and hated Alfred Beringbrooke, what had he—Luke—done that the villain's wrath should fall so heavily on him that he was doomed to a violent death on the railroad track?

He had simply overheard Peter muttering by the suicide's grave, and was supposed to have found a glove lost by Littleton on that occasion.

"I don't see any reason why he should kill me because of this, and it strikes me that he's deeper in the mire than even Groom suspects. I ought to investigate this matter—I must—but where am I to catch hold?"

With this question unsolved he fell asleep.

Early in the morning he parted with Groom and made his way back to New Haven. He expected to see more of his late assailants, but they did not put in an appearance and he reached the office without adventure.

He went with the intention of giving notice that he was going to leave Lorimer. The place had grown distasteful to him, and, "crooked" as the lawyer had shown himself to be, he did not like to work in his office and be at the same time working against him.

His intention was not carried out. Brought face to face with Lorimer, he began to feel how precarious was his position, and he said nothing.

During the afternoon, when Lorimer was out, Marmaduke Tripp came and stood beside Luke, as the latter's pen glided smoothly over the paper.

"You write a beautiful hand," said the clerk.

"Do you think so, Mr. Tripp? Thank you!"

"Clean and handsome, with no flourishes. That's business. Flourishes are an abomination."

"I'm glad you approve of my work," said Luke, but he was wondering what had led Tripp to so suddenly discover all this.

"You ought to be able to get a good living all your life with your pen. By the way, Hartley, I believe Ebenezer Hare got you this place?"

"He did, Mr. Tripp."

"Who is he?"

Marmaduke's voice was not quite so bland, and his abruptness caused Luke to look up.

"Who is he? Don't you know? You were here when he called with me."

"Oh! yes; certainly; but I mean, what is he? Is he a relative of yours?"

"No; merely my landlord. That's all I know about him."

"Where does he live?"

"No. — Water street."

"That's near Chestnut street, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't you know anything about Hare's past?"

"Nothing whatever. I never saw him until I went to room there four months ago, and I know no more about him now than I did then. Why do you ask?"

Luke's curiosity had been aroused. Tripp's questions taken in connection with Hare's expressed desire to see the inside of the clerk's desk, indicated that there was a good deal in their case if it could be understood.

Tripp, however, did not seem inclined to be confidential; he made an evasive answer to Luke's last question and then went back to his desk. There he sat gnawing at his fingers until a carrier brought in several letters. One was for Marmaduke, and he read it with a gathering frown on his face. More than that, he re-read it at once, and then remained in deep thought for some time. Then he locked it up in his own desk, where it remained until later in the day.

Finally, he took it out, re-read it once more, and began writing what seemed to be a reply. He was still engaged upon it when Lorimer called him, and they went out together.

Luke was left alone, and he glanced curiously at Tripp's desk, but, as it was locked, he did not leave his chair. Shortly after, however, a fresh lot of letters was brought in, and as one was for the clerk, he moved toward the mysterious desk.

He was about to lay the letter down when he noticed a piece of white paper protruding from the lower side of the desk.

Its position at once explained all, and Luke understood that when Marmaduke closed the leaf of the desk, the letter he had been writing had slipped half-way through the crevice between the leaf and desk proper.

For a moment the boy hesitated, and then stooped and looked at the face of the letter. Only a few written words were visible, and they were as follows:

"PETER LITTLETON:—

"Yours received—

I am greatly surprised that you—to share with me in the Ber—
You dare not!—"

All the rest was concealed by the desk, but Luke had seen enough to inflame his curiosity. Once more he hesitated. Would he be justified in trying to learn more about this letter? He believed he would, since it was to fight an iniquitous plot, and he laid hold of the visible part of the paper.

There was no resistance, and he drew it out. All that was written was then before him, and he read as follows:

"PETER LITTLETON:—Yours received, and I must say I am greatly surprised that you think of refusing to share with me in the Beringbrooke plunder. Refuse? You dare not! There is a bond which binds us together which you dare not defy. Suppose I was to tell just how Alfred Beringbrooke died? Ah! Peter, you dare not refuse. You say my demand is exorbitant; that you are willing to reward me moderately, etc., etc. Nonsense! Much wealth has made you mad. You owe the fortune to me, and I will not abate one dollar of my demand, or—"

Here the letter ended, and when Luke had read all he was seized with sudden fear. He had meddled with a dangerous secret; what if he could not replace the paper!

He lost no time in trying, and, to his great relief, it slid back through the crevice without the least bother. Once more he stood erect, and breathing freer, was assorting the letters just received from the carrier when a heavy foot-step sounded near him. He looked up quickly. There stood Tripp, a scowl on his face.

"What are you doing at my desk?" the clerk sharply demanded.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LITTLETON HOUSEHOLD.

THERE was no time to invent an excuse, and a less level-headed boy would surely have shown signs of alarm and guilt.

Luke was really somewhat startled, but it flashed upon him that there was nothing to be-

tray what he had done, and his clear eyes never wavered as he looked at Mr. Marmaduke Tripp.

"Some letters have come, sir, and one is for you. I was just going to lay it on your desk."

His manner was as natural and quiet as though he had never entertained a hostile thought toward the clerk, and the latter's suspicions were at once dispelled. He took his letter with a somewhat sheepish expression, muttered something which sounded like "Thank you!" and then sat down without pursuing his first question.

In point of fact he had seen nothing to call for such sharpness of tone as he had used, and he was annoyed to think that he had betrayed the fact that he had reason to resent Luke's presence near the mysterious desk.

Luke had quietly resumed work, but he had fresh food for thought. The clerk's unfinished letter was decidedly suggestive. What did he mean by the words: "Suppose I was to tell just how Alfred Beringbrooke died?"

There was a threat implied in connection with them, which could only be interpreted as meaning that Littleton dared not refuse Tripp a share in the Beringbrooke fortune, because, if he did, Tripp would tell how Alfred Beringbrooke died!

This was very suggestive language. If William Hallock, the suicide, had been Alfred Beringbrooke, he was supposed to have died by his own hand. Was not this the fact of the case?

As though to answer the question, Luke remembered the words he had heard Peter Littleton mutter over the grave. They were not, in themselves, positively criminating, but Peter had shown that he hated the dead man, and there was enough to build up a startling theory.

Had Hallock really not been a suicide? Had he died by the murderous hand of a fellow-man? If so, who had hated him so much that all these years had not served to make the feud forgotten?

Was the explanation of Littleton's attempt against Luke to be found in the fact that he had been the murderer?

The thought was so startling, that Luke felt weak and dismayed. If it was true, he was getting in deep and dangerous waters.

What dangers had he not dared in trying to find Alfred Beringbrooke's heirs?

The remainder of the business day seemed to drag painfully. He was anxious to get away; to be where he could think undisturbed and decide what to do; to finally decide whether he was to abandon his search for the lost heirs, or continue to defy the powerful league which was against him.

When the office closed, he went to a restaurant and, while eating a slight repast, meditated on the situation. The result was that, when he finished, he turned his face once more toward the Gray Stone Church, and on his arrival looked for the sexton.

As he had hoped, Mr. Harmon was working about the graveyard, but his face did not wear its usual cheerful expression.

"Matters are not transpiring as I could wish," he said, in reply to a question.

"What is wrong?" Luke asked.

"Some one broke into the church last night."

"Indeed! How was it, sir?"

"I wish I knew, but beyond the fact that they were there, nothing is known."

"Were they burglars?"

"Even that I don't know. A boy saw a light there late in the evening, and looking in, saw two men who were strangers to him. He reported the affair at once, but when an officer went to the church, the strangers had gone."

"And you don't know what their object was?"

"No. When the boy saw them, they were standing together and talking earnestly, but he heard nothing."

"What kind of looking men were they?"

"The boy can give no more of a description than to say that one was young and the other middle-aged. He was too much excited to remember how they looked."

Were these men Lorimer and Tripp? A liberal stretch of the imagination would make the description apply, though Tripp, even with his peculiar face, was anything but a really young man.

If it were they, what had they been doing at the church again?

"I don't know what will come next," the sexton continued. "This act, coming so soon after the mutilation of the gravestone which I showed you, is a sad commentary on man's disposition to do unlawful things."

"I don't suppose there is any clew to the defacer of Mr. Hallock's gravestone?"

"None whatever."

"When he was found dead," pursued Luke, "how did people know he killed himself?"

"The fatal revolver was found beside him."

"Was that all the evidence?"

"Yes; but the jury did not hesitate. We all decided that he was some poor fellow who had become tired of life, and had gone near the church as a fitting place to commit his rash act."

"But might not the deed have been done by some one else—a tramp, or an enemy?"

"Such a thing is possible," replied Harmon, thoughtfully, "but none of us took such a view of the case."

"Were strong efforts made to learn if any one in New Haven knew him?"

"The newspapers gave an account of the shooting, and the body was kept for identification. Few people came to see it, however, and those who did had never before seen him."

"I remember that you said the gravestone had, before it was defaced, the dead man's age. If he was a stranger, how was his age known?"

"By a mark in India ink on his left arm—about here. It was, 'Born 1842.' That was all."

"And nobody doubted that he was a suicide?"

"I heard no doubts expressed."

Luke asked many more questions in regard to the position of the body when found; in fact, all that he could think of which might throw light on the subject; but he learned nothing that he could regard as important.

He finally left Harmon and wandered away with a feeling that he had reached a point where he could see no way to go further. What was he to do—notify the police of his suspicions? So far as his theory that William Hallock was murdered, this, he felt, would be but to be laughed at.

On his information, however, Lorimer might be foiled, and the lost heirs of Alfred Beringbrooke found. Yes, he must no longer keep the secret.

Suddenly he paused. He had been wandering on in the gathering darkness without a thought as to his course, but had instinctively taken that which led to Peter Littleton's house; the location of which he had learned from a friend of Percy.

It was a very old building, or, rather, series of buildings joined together; and the hand of decay was over all. Such houses are every year being demolished around all Eastern cities, and are objects of curiosity while they remain standing.

Luke's first impulse was to retreat, but the mysterious influence which had led him thus near now urged him to go on, and he cautiously advanced. If he had stopped to think fully he would not have gone, but he felt a strong desire to see the inside of the house.

This was not difficult; a light shone from one of the lower rooms, and the boy gained the piazza which led around the house and, partially screened by a lattice which screened the piazza, looked cautiously through the blinds inside.

He saw an old-fashioned, poorly furnished kitchen, where, at one side, Percy Littleton sat with his feet elevated above his head, smoking a cigarette and looking like a dude fallen into decay.

A woman was moving about, preparing supper, and was, beyond doubt, Percy's step-mother. She was no more attractive than the rest of the family, though she plainly had far more energy.

Her face was sharp, sour and stubborn, and, ever and anon, she compressed her thin lips until they formed a mathematical line. Luke set her down as a scold and vixen, and was rather glad it was so.

Such a man as Peter Littleton ought not to have a better wife.

For awhile Luke watched, but he was just thinking that he had better retreat when the head of the family entered the kitchen. His outdoor garments showed that he had just come in, and he proceeded to take them off in his own peculiar airy way.

Neither of his companions greeted him, nor did he speak to them, and total silence reigned until supper was begun. Then Littleton's mood changed and he talked volubly, but his wife's grim face never relaxed.

Luke suspected that a storm was brewing, and he soon had proof of it. When supper was finished Mrs. Littleton sent Percy away on an errand, and then turned to her husband.

"I've got something to say to you," she grimly observed.

"Of course you have," was the flippant reply. "Did I ever sit down here of an evening without getting a lecture?"

"Did you ever sit down here when you did not deserve one?"

"Come, now, throw no stones while you live in a glass house," sneered Peter.

"Glass house or not, you'll find that I am not to be a victim of your whims. Do you think I have not got a clew to your precious game?"

"What game?"

"Oh! you're very innocent, ain't you? You know well what I mean, but I want to tell you right here that you can't humbug me a bit!"

And the amiable wife snapped her fingers close to her devoted husband's nose.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE REVOLVER'S MUZZLE.

ALL this was heard by Luke, the window being a trifle raised at the bottom, and he began to wonder a good deal what Mrs. Littleton was talking about. Her husband looked somewhat anxious, but his voice was cool and sneering as he replied:

"I don't know of a bigger humbug than yourself, but what the dickens are you talking about, anyhow?"

"When do you expect to get the Beringbrooke money?"

"As soon as the preliminaries are settled."

"What will you do then?"

"Go to England."

"Just so! And you expect me to stay here."

"Eh?"

Mr. Littleton seemed a little startled.

"Oh! you needn't be so innocent!" declared his wife. "If you take me for a blind woman, you'll get left mighty bad. I have discovered your little game. You think that you are an aristocrat; an elegant, high-toned gentleman; and that you can make your precious cub, Percy, just like you. But I—oh! in your opinion, I am so coarse and ill-bred that I am only fit for work in the kitchen, and so you aspire to leave me behind when you go to England; to cast me off, because you will no longer need a drudge. Thank you, my amiable gentleman, but the game won't work. When you go to England, I go, too!"

This long speech was delivered with all the force and spite of a woman whose temper was none too sweet at any time and it was plain that every word went home. Peter was decidedly disconcerted, and he failed to control the expression of his face.

He answered as confidently as he could:

"What in the world are you driving at? Are you gone crazy? Leave you? I never thought of such a thing."

"Spare your lies! The man you sought to make your tool; with whom you tried to make arrangements to pay me a paltry eight dollars a week; has gone back on you and told me all!"

Littleton muttered an oath, and then sat in silent dismay.

"So that is your way of rewarding me!" continued the woman, viciously. "For years I've been your slave, and by my own efforts kept you in shabby gentility. Now—now you want to cast me off!"

Peter sat staring sullenly at vacancy.

"Your game won't work!" his wife reiterated.

"See here," he said, suddenly, "how much a week shall I pay you to remain here?"

"Why do you want me to stay here?"

"Well, now, to be frank, you know you lack the refinement, polish, brilliancy, experience—the ability to shine in polite society."

Mrs. Littleton laughed harshly.

"If I had lacked the ability to wash and scrub in the past, where would you be now?"

"That is not the question. Come, you know as well as anybody that you are not fitted for high life in England. Let me make a good settlement on you, and leave you here."

"So!—you admit that you want to do it."

"Yes."

"Well, I decline. I've been a drudge for you through ten long years, and now I'm going to have my share of your good fortune. I'm going to England with you, and roll in luxury and the Beringbrooke millions. When you put on lugs, I shall put on lugs too. Perhaps I'll be a favorite at Queen Victoria's court!"

The woman's manner was as grim as her words, but it brought a flush to Littleton's face. She had been a good-enough life-partner when only her hard labor kept the family in the necessities of life, but she was vulgar, and his would-be elegant nature revolted at the idea of having her with him in prosperous days.

"You can't go!" he said, sharply. "This

money is all Percy's, not ours, and not a cent will I take until you consent to a separation."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes."

"Then you are an ungrateful wretch."

"Call it what you will; you've heard my decision."

"You will change it."

"I will not!"

"Don't be too sure of that; I say you will. Do you think I have no ambition? Do you think I will let the chance slip to be a fine lady?"

"You can't help yourself."

"I can and will. You will take me to England and give me the position of a lady, or I will proclaim two things to the wide world. First, I'll tell that Alfred Beringbrooke left heirs who, really, own all the English property; secondly, I'll tell how Alfred Beringbrooke died! So, there!"

Her words fell with startling effect on two pair of ears. Listening Luke saw at a glance that she knew something about the very points on which he wished information; and Peter Littleton's face assumed a most murderous expression.

He sprang to his feet.

"Silence!" he hissed. "Not another word of that kind, or I'll not answer for what I do."

As he spoke he flashed a keen, startled glance around, but the blinds protected Luke from discovery.

"It all rests with yourself," coolly observed Mrs. Littleton. "Use me well, and you will find me as mum as the Sphinx, for I won't cut my own nose off; but don't you think you can scare me. If you fail to give me my due, I can, and will, send you to the gallows!"

The words had barely passed the woman's lips when Littleton sprang forward and caught her by the throat. The expression of his face was so fiendish that Luke almost uttered a startled cry, and he fully expected to see a terrible tragedy, but the woman wrenched herself away with an exhibition of strength that one could hardly have expected.

Then she sprang back, dropped her hand to her pocket and raised it again with a revolver glittering in the lamplight.

There was a double click, and then the weapon bore full upon Littleton.

He had started to follow her, but the revolver brought him to his senses.

"Keep your distance!" she coolly said. "I expected all this, and was prepared. Knowing your way of dealing with those you don't like, I'll not be caught in the fix that Alfred Beringbrooke was."

"For God's sake, stop!" exclaimed Peter, his teeth chattering. "Don't you know the old saying that walls have ears? No more of such talk."

"Oh! but you don't think it necessary for you to stop when you would have strangled me!" she scoffed, not a waver in her voice.

"I had no idea of it; I swear that I had not. I only wanted to stop what you were saying. Come, there is no reason why we should quarrel. Put away your revolver, and let us calmly—"

He stopped suddenly.

The sound of a gong bell had gone echoing through the house, and Luke comprehended that it was caused by some one at the front door. It made a vast difference in the room. Littleton drew back two or three paces, and then motioned toward the door.

"See who is there," he said. "We will talk later."

His face indicated more relief than anything else, but the woman remained cool and walked backward toward the door. When she had gone from the room, Peter passed his hand nervously across his face.

That he had been badly frightened could not be doubted.

Luke felt that he had not thrown away time by coming there. Mrs. Littleton knew a good deal about her husband's affairs; enough, if her boast was true, "to send him to the gallows;" and they had quarreled.

Was it possible to turn this quarrel to the good of the real Beringbrooke heirs?

He had no time to consider this point closely, for, to his surprise, Phineas Lorimer and Marmaduke Tripp entered the room.

Evidently they were not wholly unexpected by Littleton, for he placed chairs for them promptly, and seemed to try to betray no nervousness.

The visitors sat down, and Lorimer came to business at once.

"I presume you were surprised to have us ask for an interview here, but it was for a good reason, as I will proceed to show."

"I'm glad you came," Littleton replied, "for I must say that I don't like to talk business in your office."

"Why not?" Lorimer asked, in surprise.

"Because there's a pair of ears there that I'm afraid of—I refer to that young hound who works in the office—Hartley. In the name of the fiend, who and what is that boy?"

CHAPTER XIV.

A LIVELY RECEPTION.

THE lawyer looked very much surprised.

"Why, he's a young chap who is my office-boy; Luke Hartley is his name. What do you mean by your questions?"

"What do you know of him?" Littleton asked.

"Well, he came to me recommended by one Ebenezer Hare, a man who brings me a good deal of business. I told him I wanted a level-headed boy, and that, in law—at least, in my office—means one not too confounded conscientious. So Hare brought that boy. He knew him well; in fact, only for him, Luke would have been in prison now."

"Oh, I've no doubt he's a sharp young rascal; but isn't he too sharp? What's he skulking around the Gray Stone Church for?"

"Eh?" said Lorimer, blankly.

Littleton repeated his last question.

"When has he been there?" the lawyer asked, a troubled expression on his face.

"Twice, at least," and Peter named the nights of Luke's first and second visits to the graveyard.

Lorimer and Tripp showed immediate signs of dismay, and glanced at each other. Up to that time they had been able to form no theory as to who the prowler in the church had been, the night they mutilated the register; up to this time they had tried to believe it had been a harmless tramp, but a startling explanation of the affair was now vouchsafed.

Luke, listening at the blind, thanked the good fortune which had made him acquainted with this revelation in time. Clearly, his career in Lorimer's office was over, and it would be well for him to keep out of the lawyer's way.

"Can it be possible?" asked Lorimer aloud, looking at Tripp.

"I'm afraid it is," the clerk answered, even more dolefully.

"I didn't think it of him."

"Well, I remember now that I caught him nosing around my desk to-day. I thought then that there was something wrong, but he made such a plausible explanation that I soon forgot it."

"He's a confounded spy; that's what he is," said Littleton, who did not know what was on his visitors' minds, but was anxious to do all he could to hurt Luke. "He's been sneaking around after me ever since I called at your office, and the sooner his hash is settled, the better."

The speaker did not think it necessary to tell what he had done to try and remove the boy.

"I'll bet a dollar that lost leaf is in his hands," said Tripp.

"If so, we're ruined!" the lawyer declared.

"Unless we can silence him."

"That's well put in."

"This is all Greek to me," declared Littleton. "What 'leaf' have you lost?"

"Well, to be frank, we two entered the old church and tore out of the record-book the leaf containing the marriage record of Alfred Beringbrooke and his wife. I had it in my hand and was leaving the church when I saw some one skulking in a pew. I sprang forward and seized him, but found I had got a Tartar. He flew at me like a tiger, gave me blow after blow—you can see marks of them now—and ended by knocking me over. Then he escaped, and we could not find him. Well, all this while I thought I had the register-leaf in my hand, but when I got home, not a sign of it could I find."

"You had lost it?"

"Yes, and where, I don't know; but, after some thought, I decided that it was in my hand when the prowler knocked me over."

"You ought to have gone to the church at once."

"We went there last night, but there was no sign of the leaf. I now believe the prowler, whoever he was, stole it. If it was that boy, we may all go to prison yet."

"It would be just like him," said Littleton.

"But what could be his object?" Tripp asked.

Nobody was able to give a satisfactory explanation.

"On second thought I return to my first opin-

ion; that the leaf was swept up with other refuse matter," the clerk thoughtfully said.

Littleton brightened.

"Had the church been newly swept?"

"Yes."

"Then there is still hope. Everything swept up is dropped into the basement, where there is a proper place for it; and the accumulated dirt is taken away now and then, while the scraps of paper go to feed the fire. At this time of year there is no fire kept, and your missing paper may be safe in the basement."

Both Lorimer and Tripp looked greatly relieved.

"Let's settle it at once," said the former.

"Will you go with us, Littleton?"

Peter hesitated for a moment, and then answered with sudden alacrity that he would. Some abrupt thought had brought him to this conclusion, and he at once rose and put on his hat.

Up to this time Luke had listened with unceasing attention, but matters had reached a crisis where it seemed that mere listening would not defeat the plotting trio. If the stolen leaf was neither destroyed nor in their hands, it ought not to be allowed to again fall into their clutches.

Suddenly it occurred to him that if the church people knew that the edifice had been broken into, as the old sexton said, it was likely they had taken precautions against the repetition of such a visit.

Convinced of this, he decided to follow the trio and see how they succeeded.

The darkness and nature of the ground were in his favor, and he had little fear of being discovered.

The men came out and started for the church, but had gone only a few rods when they met a fourth man. This person looked at them sharply, and Peter returned the gaze. Luke thought it prudent to hide behind a group of bushes, and as the man came nearer and paused only a few feet away, he was glad he did so.

Unless he was greatly mistaken, the man was no stranger; he looked very much like the big fellow who had figured in the exciting scenes following his abduction.

Just as he was thinking this, Nettleton left his companions and came back.

"Jake, is it you?" he asked.

"Yes. Where are you going? I was on my way to your house."

"Business?"

"Nothing in particular."

"Well, see here, Jake; I've got an engagement which I can't break, but I'll see you again. I was just thinking of you. Fact is, I've got a job for you."

"Name it!" said Jake, briefly.

"The old woman and I are out," Peter cautiously replied.

"That so?"

"Yes, and, what is worse, she bids fair to upset the fattest plum which ever hung in my reach; in fact, to cheat me out of a fortune."

"No woman could do that to me. Egad; I'd send her off to the happy hunting grounds by Express."

Littleton laid his hand on Jake's arm and spoke in a low, husky voice:

"Old man, I'll give a thousand dollars to have her silenced—forever, mind—inside of three days!"

"Do you mean biz?"

"Yes."

"Then, by Jove, you can count on giving me the cash. I don't let no such chance slip. Do I catch your meaning plain? It's to be—death?"

"Death!" hissed Littleton. "The fool stands in my way like a balky mule, and she must take what she deserves. But, mind you, Jake, you must strike when I am where I can prove an alibi."

"I will. Come to my house to-morrow, and we'll fix the time."

"Good! I'll be there. Has your wife come back?"

"No. She hasn't shown up since she released the boy. If she does—"

A significant pause ended the sentence.

"I guess you're all right," said Littleton, with a laugh. "Well, I'll see you to-morrow. Good-night!"

He then hastened to rejoin Lorimer and Tripp while Jake moved away at right angles with his former course. Luke left his cover and cautiously followed the trio. Where they went he must go for awhile, but he was getting heartily tired of the adventure. He had fallen on a depth of iniquity which dismayed him, and, cool as he was, he felt anything but willing to keep even remote company with such villains.

They made their way toward the Gray Stone Church, and paused no more until the graveyard was reached. Here Littleton seemed to be once more assailed with curiosity.

"They say somebody has been mutilating gravestones, here," he said, trying to speak carelessly. "I don't suppose that was your work?"

"It wasn't mine," the lawyer answered. "Perhaps Tripp can give you information."

"Nonsense!" cried out Marmaduke, sharply.

"It seems that somebody has been at it," Littleton added.

At this point Luke saw Tripp punch the speaker viciously, but in such a way as not to be seen by Lorimer; and Peter suddenly became mute. The lawyer, unconscious of this by-play, did not suspect that he had any interest in the matter alluded to, and the three resumed their way. It flashed upon Luke, however, that Tripp knew more about the defaced gravestone than he was willing to admit; his course in silencing their companion certainly meant something.

The confederates now approached the church. The place was dark and silent.

Luke began to have misgivings, and feel that he ought to give the alarm, but he did not know where to go. While he was still hesitating, and standing at a distance, the plotters gained a point near the rear door of the church and Tripp prepared to pick the lock.

He and his friends had an unpleasant surprise, however.

At the first click of the burglarious tools, several men darted around the corner of the church, and swooped down upon the burglars. The latter were in a trap; the new-comers were officers!

CHAPTER XV.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

IN an instant the whole scene changed as though by magic. The plotters had not expected any interference with their plans, and when they realized that they were really beset by officers, consternation seized upon them.

Marmaduke Tripp dropped his jimmy, and then the three turned and ran at full speed, the lawyer in the lead, though he was the heaviest man of the three.

Luke Hartley saw that the chase would bring them near him, and he flung himself flat among some bushes and waited with keen interest to see the result.

All the would-be intruders had avoided instant capture, and, from the way in which they covered ground, it actually looked as though they would get the best of the race. Unfortunately, the policemen were not only heavyweights but well advanced in years, and they lost ground at every step.

Seeing this, one of them spoke sharply:

"Halt, there! Hold up, or we'll fire!"

Not a word from the fugitives, nor did they pause.

"For the last time, halt!"

"Go to perdition!" defiantly retorted Littleton.

Crack!

The leading officer fired, but his aim was so poor that the bullet came nearer Luke than any one else.

Littleton was in a thoroughly belligerent mood, and he drew a revolver, himself, but Tripp caught his arm.

"Don't fire!" he exclaimed. "Are you mad? You'll send us all to the gallows."

"I'd like to send those fellows to glory."

"Hold up! There must be no bloodshed!" panted Lorimer, whose "wind" was none too good.

Pursued and pursuers passed the hiding boy, and when they were fairly gone he got away from that locality as rapidly as he could conveniently go. If the case had got to the point of fighting, he wanted no part in it, and, without stopping to see the result of the affair, he made the best of his way back to New Haven.

Once in his room he had ample food for thought.

Among other things, it was clear that he was done at Lorimer's office. After what Peter Littleton had said, it would not do for him to show himself to the lawyer.

He decided to go to the police the following day, and, after falling asleep, dreamed the wildest things imaginable.

The next day he set out to find a confidant for his important and perilous secrets; but, just as he was crossing State street, he came upon Abner Groom, the man who had saved him from death on the railroad track.

The old Beringbrooke servant recognized Luke

and seemed glad to see him, and as the boy remembered the mark which Harmon, the sexton, had said was on William Hallock's arm, he determined to see if Groom knew anything about it.

"By the way," he said, carelessly, "I have been thinking about what you said the other night. It seems pretty bad that Alfred Beringbrooke can't be found. I suppose he didn't have any peculiar birth-marks by which he could be recognized by strangers?"

"There was something to the same effect," Groom replied. "When a youth he had a sailor mark the date of his birth on his left arm, with blue ink."

"The full date?"

"Well, no; I believe it was simply, 'Born, 1842.'"

This was exactly what the old sexton had said was on Hallock's arm, and Luke no longer had a doubt. Strange as it had been that the "suicide" was not recognized, there could be little doubt that Hallock and Alfred Beringbrooke were one.

Luke concealed his satisfaction and talked on quietly, but, in a few minutes, Ebenezer Hare passed. The landlord had been very good-natured since he made his attempt to induce Luke to secretly admit him to the office, and he now smiled blandly as he passed.

The boy turned to Groom, to renew conversation, when he was struck by the expression on the old man's face. He was looking after Hare intently, and with more than ordinary interest expressed on his face.

"Do you know him?" Luke asked.

"Know him!" Groom emphatically repeated.

"Well, I ought to. Do you know him?"

"His name is Ebenezer Hare."

"Indeed! Well, I am willing to take my oath that such is not his name. I never forget a face, and I have not forgotten his."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Roger Perkins. Probably you don't remember ever hearing it, but he is the man who, as I told you, was suspected of connection with Alfred Beringbrooke in that forgery and sent to prison. I once heard that he died there, but I can swear that this man was he. So he calls himself Ebenezer Hare, now? Naturally, he wished to change his name, but I don't believe he or Alfred had a hand in the forgery. By the way, I am going to find out this afternoon what was the name of the lady Alfred married."

"By going to the church?"

"Yes."

"I am going that way, myself, and if you will tell me where to meet you, I will find out."

Groom hesitated and expressed a doubt that Luke could get the information, but, the boy was so sure, made an appointment for three o'clock and then went on.

Luke turned his face toward the Gray Stone Church.

"I'll go there first of all, and search in the basement for that paper. If it has been swept down there, as Peter Littleton suggested, I'll find it. Once let me get it and the whole of them will be in my hands, and it only remains to find Alfred Beringbrooke's lost heirs."

Straight toward the old church he went, his mind dwelling the greater part of the time on Abner Groom's assertion that Hare was, really, Roger Perkins, and connected with that old-time drama.

This was surprising, but Luke was not sorry; possibly Hare could be made useful.

It had been the boy's intention to apply to the pastor of the church for permission to visit the basement, but, finding the old sexton at work there, he made the request of him.

Harmon looked surprised.

"Why do you want to go down?"

"I think there is a lost paper there, which I wish to find, sir."

"What have you lost?"

"I've lost nothing, but some one else has. I think it has been swept down into the basement."

The sexton felt it his duty to be very cautious after the events of the previous night, when, as he learned in the morning, three men had been seen trying to break into the church, but had escaped; but, as the basement contained nothing of value which could be carried away unseen, he decided to oblige this bright-faced boy, to whom he had taken a fancy.

So he allowed Luke to go down.

The way was from a small room off the main one, where a stairway was covered over with a trap-door, and this was left open when Luke went below.

The boy found himself in a long, semi-dark

room, or, as it might be called, a cellar. The floor was of cement; the walls were of brick; and the two windows protected with strong iron bars. No burglar could easily force them, and the single door leading directly outside was of iron. If the keyhole was a criterion, a heavy bolt secured it.

A strong place it was, and, when the trap-door was down, hard to get into, or out of.

Under a smaller trap in the floor—to which no stairs led—was a pile of papers and dust which had been swept down from time to time.

Luke eagerly began operations. He remembered the exact color of the missing leaf—it was a shade of blue—and if all the papers had not been so coated with dust, his task would have been easy. As it was, he had to shake each one and examine it carefully.

In this way half an hour passed. Paper after paper had been looked at and flung aside as useless to him. They were of all kinds; it seemed as though people made the church floor a general depository; but not one interested him.

Suddenly, however, he started.

A cloud of dust had gone floating away from a crumpled sheet in his hand, and as he straightened it out, he saw the well-remembered shade of blue.

More than that, it was of the size of the blank book, as near as he could judge.

He eagerly read what was there written.

Ay, it was the leaf from the record-book, but on the first page he saw no sign of Alfred Beringbrooke's name. He turned it over.

"Married—Palmer—Maynard—Abbott—"

None of these was what he wanted, but the correct one came at last:

"December 20th, 1865, Alfred Beringbrooke to—"

This was the end of a line, and, before Luke could look further, a bright blaze flashed up in front of him, and, as he sprang back, a volume of smoke swept into his eyes and mouth.

He retreated a few steps, coughing and wondering how the fire had begun, but as his eyes cleared he had a glimpse of the stairs and a startling discovery was made.

A man was retreating up them, and Luke recognized the vindictive face of Peter Littleton!

One moment he was visible, and then he disappeared at the head of the stairs and a "bang" followed. In a moment the truth flashed upon the boy.

The trap-door had been closed, and he was shut in the basement—a veritable dungeon, as we have already said—by the villain who had first fired the church, in order to accomplish his death.

Yes, the stairway was on fire, and a peculiar odor told that it had been covered with kerosene. From this point, his sole avenue of escape, dense smoke began rolling up, but was driven back from the tightly-fastened trap-door to fill the air-tight cellar. A horrible death seemed Luke's lot.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MOST STARTLING DISCOVERY OF ALL.

FOR a moment Luke stood like one turned to marble, but, as a realization of his danger swept over him, he made a rush for the stairs. He intended to make a dash up, but, when he reached there, he found the whole place one sheet of flame.

Pass it he could not, and he turned back. The basement was rapidly filling with smoke, and he made a move for the iron door next. There was a bare hope that it was not locked. He reached and tried it—and then fell back at once.

It was locked, and one might as well try to beat down a rock.

His head remained clear, and he saw that if he could not get rid of the stifling smoke, he must soon smother. This he could do by breaking the windows, which would probably create a draft, but the bars would prevent him from passing out himself.

Why could he not pass up through the smaller trap—the one through which the sweepings of the church were brushed? He looked eagerly around. A barrel caught his attention, and he rolled it toward the desired point. Here, however, the blazing dust-heap met him again.

The smoke was becoming almost unendurable, but, working desperately, he dashed the burning papers aside, using the barrel as a spade, and then planted it as he wished.

Quickly he mounted to the top. Would the trap-door prove movable?

On this all his future depended.

He touched it with his hands and pushed upward sharply. A fragment of the floor flew up

promptly—the way of escape was open, for the main room of the church showed little signs of flame or smoke.

Luke caught at the edges of the floor and began raising himself, but an unexpected trouble assailed him. The raising of the trap-door had created a chimney, and through this the smoke rushed in suffocating clouds.

The boy tried to hasten his movements, but the strength seemed gone from his arms and he hung, almost in a fainting condition, in the aperture. Despite all he could do, he must soon drop back to the basement.

Suddenly, however, there was a pressure on his arms and he was lifted up; the trap-door fell; and he dropped prostrate at the old sexton's feet.

He had been saved just in time.

His lungs seemed bursting with the quantity of smoke in them, but, before his eyes were fairly cleared, he was borne to the door; and then he was conscious in a vague way that he breathed fresh air, and was supplied with fresh water by some friendly hand.

Finally his mind became clearer, and he opened his eyes. He met the kind gaze of the old sexton.

"You're all right now, my boy; don't be alarmed," said Harmon, reassuringly.

"But the church?" muttered Luke.

"All right, except for a scorching in the basement. Luckily, I had gone to get men to do some work, and they were on hand just in time to help me. But the firemen have had their chance since, and the danger is all past."

"Is the boy able to speak?"

It was a new and sterner voice, and Luke looked up and saw some one he judged was an officer.

"Yes, sir; I'm all right," he replied.

"Well, the fellow who we suppose fired the church and shut you in, has skipped for New Haven. We're going for him right away, but we don't know him. Do you? Did you see him? What is his name?"

"His name is Peter Littleton," Luke promptly answered.

There were several exclamations of surprise about him, and then the officer asked:

"Are you sure?"

"I am—dead sure!"

"Then he's our meat."

So saying, the officer hastened away.

Luke found himself feeling better every moment, and when a carriage drove up in which it was proposed to take him to the sexton's for a while, he at first resisted, but yielded to Harmon's earnest request.

Up to this time he had thought nothing about the recovered leaf of the record-book, and when he did remember it, he had no clear recollection of what he had done with it; but when he thrust his hand in his pocket, he felt it there all right. He would not examine it in the presence of so many people, so he let it remain for the time.

Having entered the carriage with Harmon and an officer, they were driven toward the former's house. As they progressed Luke saw that they were going to pass Littleton's, and he was looking curiously at it when he caught sight of a skulking figure in the rear.

More sharply he looked, for the figure seemed familiar—yes, it was that of "Jake."

Instantly a startling suspicion flashed upon the boy. Why was Jake there? Why, unless to carry out the deadly plan he had laid with Littleton? In the press of events Luke had forgotten how necessary it was to at once put it out of Jake's power to do mischief, but, it seemed, he was reminded of it just in time.

He caught the officer's arm.

"We must watch that man!"

"What man?"

"The one back of the house. See?"

"Watch him! Why?"

"I believe he is going to do murder."

"The blazes you do! Why?"

"I have no time to explain. Come, let us get out and move along that piazza. The man has not seen us, and the piazza will hide our movements. Come, there is no time to lose!"

His earnestness carried the officer along with him, though he had no idea what the boy was talking about. He wondered afterward that he went so rapidly but he was carried on the current, as it were.

Reaching the piazza, they crept along to the corner of the house. The piazza extended on two sides, and the man, Jake, was on the second. Looking cautiously around the corner, they saw him just stealing through the back-door.

His manner was such that the officer hesitated no longer, but quickly, though cautiously,

gained the nearest window, the sash of which was raised.

Mrs. Littleton sat in a chair, her back to the door, and her head resting on her hand. She was in deep thought, and neither heard Jake's stealthy movements nor saw his dark face at the door.

He grinned evilly, drew a knife and crept forward. The nonchalance with which he prepared to commit so horrible a crime was astonishing.

The scoundrel had removed his shoes, and not a sound betrayed him. Nearer he crept to the unsuspecting woman, the deadly knife ready for the murderous blow.

The officer waited for no more. Springing through the window, he covered the would-be assassin with a revolver.

"Hands up!" he exclaimed. "You blood-thirsty brute, your race is run."

It was a startling tableau. Mrs. Littleton had sprung to her feet in alarm, and it needed but one glance at the ruffian to show her how narrow had been her escape. Luke had followed the officer, and he promptly barred the door. Jake seemed more chagrined than frightened, and managed to break into a laugh.

"Ha! ha! it's a good joke all around, I guess. I don't know you, Mr. Man, but this lady is one of my best friends. She will tell you so."

"No, I won't!" retorted Mrs. Littleton. "You're no friend of mine, and I believe you came to kill me."

"He did," put in Luke. "I heard him agree to do so."

Jake turned to the boy. For the first time he recognized him, and his face fell, but he tried to brave it out.

"You lie, you little snake! How dare you slander a gentleman like me?"

"That'll do, my man," put in the officer. "You're in for it, and squealing will do you no good. Drop that knife, and then I'll put on the 'bracelets.'"

Jake stormed—protested—threatened—but there was no help for it, and the officer soon had him secured. When this was done, Luke went to Mrs. Littleton.

"Do you know who was at the bottom of this?" he asked.

"I think I can guess."

"It was your husband."

She shut her thin lips tightly, and then replied:

"I thought so."

"After this," pursued Luke, "I don't think you will refuse to tell all you know about him—and you once told him you could send him to the gallows."

She looked surprised, but did not hesitate.

"I can, and will. He is a murderer, and the whole world shall know it. Over in the graveyard sleeps a man supposed to have died a suicide, but it was Peter Littleton's hand sent him to his grave, and the secret shall be kept no longer!"

Luke was triumphant, but, as the officer called Mrs. Littleton's attention, recollection of the register leaf which he had not yet examined caused him to take it from his pocket.

Only a few words had he read when surprise, doubt, amazement, flashed in turn to his face. This was the record in full:

"MARRIED."

"December 29th, 1865, Alfred Beringbrooke to Anna Louise Everton, both of New Haven."

"Beringbrooke, born in New Haven, 1842; son of Rupert, grandson of Wayland; family of Beringbrookes of Sheffield and London, England."

"Everton, born in Providence, R. I., 1844; daughter of James L.; granddaughter of Robert; English ancestry."

Then followed the name of the officiating clergyman.

But why should Luke be so astonished?

Simply because his mother's maiden name had been Anna Louise Everton, and it came to him with startling force that he was the son of Alfred Beringbrooke!

His search for the lost heirs had been successful, and he stood there, gazing blankly at the record, conscious only of the startling denouement of his investigation.

He, and he alone, was the heir to the immense fortune.

CHAPTER XVII.

RETRIBUTION!

TWICE the officer spoke to Luke before the latter heard him. The youth was like one in a dream. Never, while pursuing his search, had it occurred to him that he might be connected with the Beringbrooke case, but his mind now went back to the death-scene at his mother's

bed, and, remembering what she had vainly tried to tell him, he felt that she had not intended to leave him in ignorance of the truth.

There was, however, still a good deal of mystery about the case, and he could not understand why he bore the name of Hartley.

When aroused by the officer, he saw the need of prompt action.

Jake had got to go to prison, but what of Mrs. Littleton? If she was given time, her resolution to tell all that she knew might waver or fail altogether.

Realizing this, he asked her to accompany him to New Haven and make her statement at once, and she agreed without hesitation. They started at once, accompanied by the officer, who was not long in placing Jake in secure quarters.

On the way Luke had chance to think clearly, and he decided that if his case was good for anything, it was worth the attention of a good lawyer, and he took his companions to one of the best in New Haven—his identity may here be concealed, for obvious reasons, under the name, Mr. Gregerson.

Luke held a long interview with him, while the others waited, and all the boy's astonishing discoveries were rapidly related.

Mr. Gregerson was equally surprised, but there was that in Luke's manner which answered for his veracity, and the man of law would not lose the chance to handle a case where so much money was at stake.

He had Mrs. Littleton brought into the office.

"You are the wife of Peter Littleton?"

"I was," she answered, viciously, "but I now repudiate the bond. He has tried to kill me, and I am now only his enemy."

"You are his second wife?"

"Yes."

"His first was a Miss Beringbrooke, sister of one Alfred Beringbrooke?"

"Yes."

"Where is Alfred now?"

"Dead, and buried in the Gray Stone Church ground as William Hallock."

"Why was he buried under a false name?"

"Because he was not recognized by any friend after he was found dead. He was a suicide, people said."

"Was this not the fact?"

"He was murdered!"

"By whom?"

"By Peter Littleton."

"Will you swear to that?"

"I will swear that he told me so."

"Why should Littleton kill him?"

"Hatred and fear were the motives. The two men had never been friends, for Beringbrooke was honest, ambitious, and not afraid to work, while Peter Littleton was dishonest and lazy. Their first great trouble came when he wanted to engage in some wild business venture in South America. He had no money and could not borrow; he asked Alfred to borrow for him, and was refused. From that moment he hated his brother-in-law bitterly."

"Then came the news that Alfred had forged the name of the firm which employed him, and only flight saved the young man. He was, however, innocent. Peter Littleton and his brother, Robert, committed the forgery. It did them no good, though, for the man they made their innocent tool, Roger Perkins, was arrested in trying to draw the money. He was tried and sent to prison—innocent though he was—and Alfred only escaped by flight."

"The latter was in hiding for some time, but the disgrace weighed heavily on his mind, and, after some months, he left his wife and babe, who were in Lowell, Massachusetts, and secretly returned to this city."

"He was married at the Gray Stone Church, and, one evening, lonely and discouraged, he wandered there. Unfortunately, he met Peter Littleton there. He had always believed Peter to be the forger, and he now accused him of it. A quarrel followed: Alfred threatened to have an investigation; and, moved by hatred and fear, Littleton suddenly drew a revolver and shot the poor gentleman dead."

"There he was found the next day. His identity was not discovered; nobody that came to see the body recognized it. A letter in his pocket, addressed to 'William Hallock,' led to the belief that such was his name, and charitable people subscribed enough money to erect a stone at his grave."

"I am, however, prepared to say, and swear, that Peter Littleton came home just after committing the deed, and told me of it boastfully. He said that he killed Alfred Beringbrooke, and I saw the body the next day and can swear that it was Beringbrooke's."

This statement was put in writing, and then came another revelation. Questioned concerning Peter Littleton's brother, Robert, the woman stated that, though he had been in New Haven no more than a month in all, from 1854 to 1870, he had since that date been employed as a clerk by Phineas Lorimer, attorney, and was known as Marmaduke Tripp.

Here was a surprise for Luke, but, remembering the desire of Roger Perkins, *alias* Ebenezer Hare, to see the inside of the clerk's desk, he asked Mrs. Littleton what she knew about it.

She knew nothing, but her testimony that Tripp held the pen which executed the forgery, in 1866, was so conclusive that Mr. Gregerson decided to have him arrested at once.

As soon as preliminaries could be arranged, Gregerson, Luke and two officers went to Lorimer's office. They found that person and his clerk in close conversation, and their arrival was like a thunderbolt to the schemers. Lorimer's florid face turned pale, and Tripp's expression was one of hopeless dismay.

Before anything could be said, however, there was a rush of flying feet, the door was dashed open, and Peter Littleton stood there, wild-eyed and panting.

"Hide me!" he gasped. "Hide me, somewhere, quick! The devils are on my track, and—"

He paused as his roving glance encountered Luke's face; his expression grew even more terrified; he clutched at his throat, as though air was wanting, and then fell senseless to the floor.

Two policemen here entered. One walked to Littleton's side and touched his arm.

"He is our prisoner!" he said.

"And these men," coolly put in Gregerson, pointing to Lorimer and Tripp, "are my prisoners. This seems to be a bad day for villainy!"

Lorimer had schemed and lost. Enough was proven against him at his trial to send him to prison for a term of years. He had always been more or less crooked, and he received his reward.

So did Robert Littleton, *alias* Marmaduke Tripp. In his mysterious desk were found papers which clearly showed him to be the forger of the check, and proved Alfred Beringbrooke and Perkins, *alias* Hare, innocent. Why had he allowed such evidence to exist? We answer, first, without definite suspicion aroused, the evidence would have been vague, and might never have cast a cloud on his reputation; secondly, why is it that the majority of criminals always make some move of childish stupidity, even when their main plot is one of great cunning?

Circumstances had led Ebenezer Hare to suspect what was in the desk, hence, his desire to see inside it. He had the satisfaction of seeing Tripp sent to prison for ten years, while he was at last exonerated. But he had served five years in prison before he had received a pardon.

As a man, Hare was close, miserly and unscrupulous. He had long been an agent for Lorimer, to bring him in business, and when the latter fell from his pedestal, Hare saw fit to hurriedly depart from New Haven. Where he went, none there knew.

Peter Littleton's lot was the darkest. He would surely have gone to the gallows, but after his fainting fit in Lorimer's office, he had a series of spasms which proved fatal in a week's time.

Level-Headed Luke had no one to oppose him, and, through the efforts of his lawyer, it was clearly established that he was the son of Alfred Beringbrooke, and heir to the fortune in England.

Investigation showed that when Alfred left his wife, just before he was murdered at the Gray Stone Church, he had stated that he should go to England and try to interest his wealthy relatives there to furnish money to prove his innocence; and that he had directed her to take the name of Hartley and patiently await his return, promising to write.

He did write, stating that he was about to sail, but afterward missed the steamer. This was his last letter, for, in a few days, he was dead. His devoted wife waited—waited—waited! How much the word expresses! She waited for news that never came, and she dared not advertise for "tidings of Alfred Beringbrooke."

In the course of time she accepted the belief that he was dead, and then her real widowhood began. All through the years she protected her husband's name indirectly, and not even Luke, her son, knew the truth.

When she did try to tell him it was too late,

and she passed to the mystic land to join her husband.

From the time of his flight to that of his death Alfred figured under various assumed names, but Mrs. Beringbrooke had never heard that of "William Hallock," and though she may have stood by his grave she could gain no clew therefrom.

Littleton had always been highly excited and nervous over his crime, and when he saw Luke in the graveyard that night, he first thought it his victim's ghost, and then imagined that he was suspected, and that his lost glove must be recovered so that the other prowler in the city of the dead would not connect him with the man who had muttered.

Why none of the people who had known Alfred suspected Luke's identity is easily explained. They had never heard the name, Hartley, in connection with the case; Ebenezer Hare had never seen Luke's mother until she hired a room in his house; and the parties to the old drama had lost all trace of Alfred's family.

Luke, on getting possession of his fortune, tried to reward all those who had helped him.

"Jake" had been sent to prison, but his meek wife was given a good sum for releasing Luke on a memorable night; Abner Groom was made happy, both with money, and by seeing a real Beringbrooke again at the front; the old sexton had a generous gift; and Mrs. Peter Littleton and Percy would have been remembered had they not suddenly disappeared. Report says they went West.

Luke had the remains of his parents placed side by side, and a beautiful monument erected to their memory.

Our young friend is fast growing to manhood, and is fully, but prudently, enjoying the fortune he so unexpectedly won when he became hunter of lost heirs.

THE END.

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